

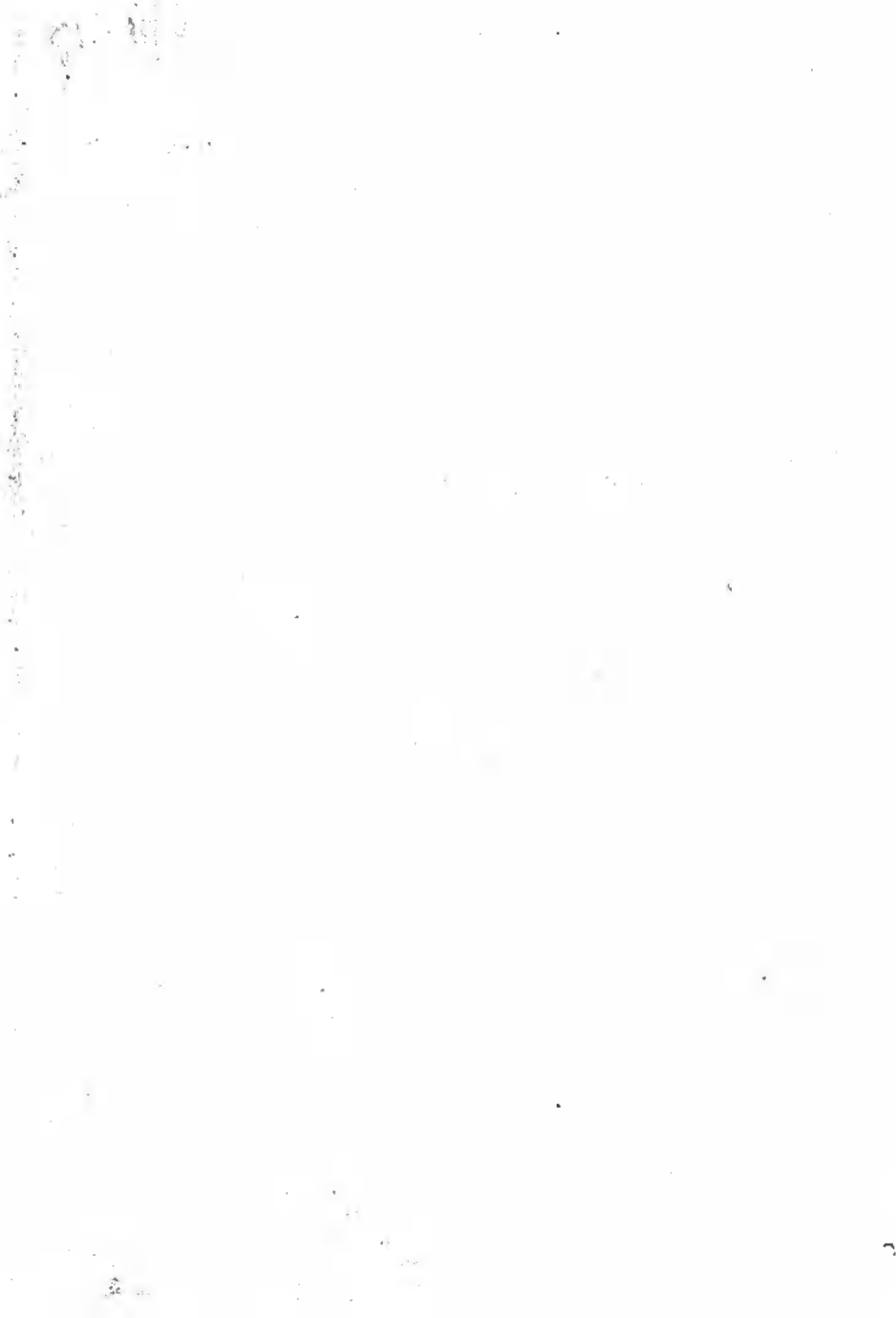
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Finding Out About  
**THE TROJANS**

*by*

H. E. L. MELLERSH, F.L.S.

*Illustrated by*

JEANETTE MELLERSH

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I also acknowledge with thanks permission to reproduce photographs, from Mrs. Ventris and Mr. John Chadwick; the Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, the Ashmolean Museum, and the *Radio Times* Hulton Picture Library.

H. E. L. MELLERSH

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# I

## TROY: WHEN AND WHERE

*Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?*

IT WAS. Faust, on the primrose path to damnation, conjured it forth because he wanted to kiss the most beautiful girl who had ever lived. And whose face? Helen's of course, Helen of Troy.

*And drink delight of battle with my peers,  
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.*

That is Tennyson, writing a poem about Ulysses, whom the Greeks called Odysseus (accent on second syllable: ODD-ISS-IOUS).

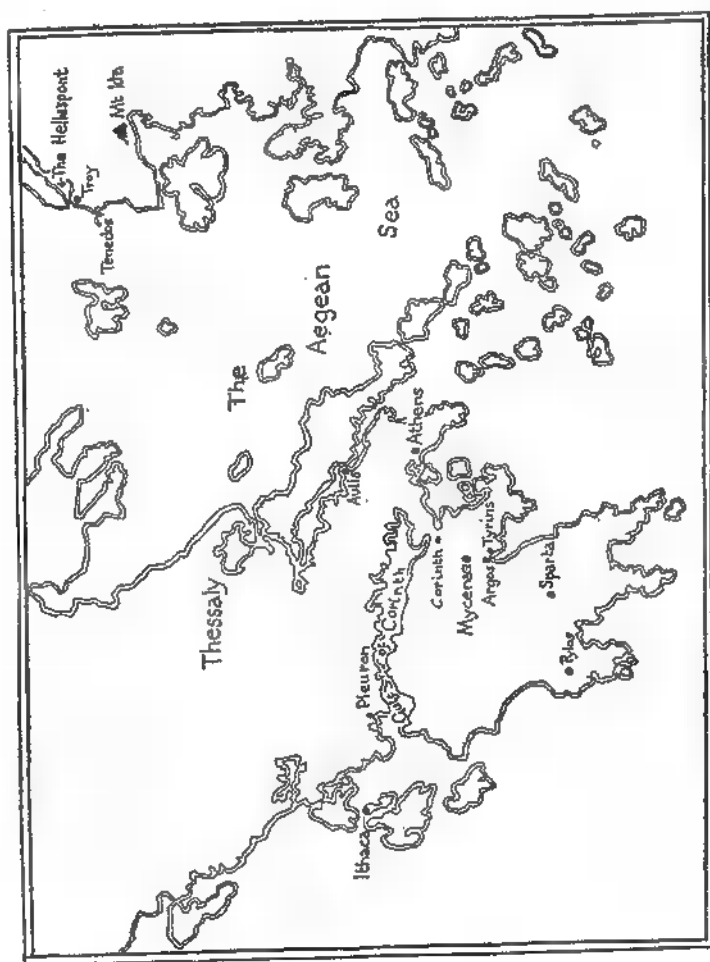
Thus Troy seems to have attracted the poets. Why? And where is Troy, and weren't they battling there a very long time ago?

The answers to these questions which any reasonable person of this age might ask—not "day and age", that being what they call ■ tautology and a pretty beastly one at that—the answers are somewhat bound up together. The siege of Troy, with the wrath of Achilles and the wooden horse and all the rest, was indeed a long

time ago, probably in fact about one hundred and five generations ago, counting thirty years to a generation—not in your grandfather's time but in the time of your "great, great, great" 103 times and then grandfather. Which is exactly the reason, or rather one of the reasons, why the poets have always had their imaginations stirred by the story—the other main reason being that it is a very good story indeed. You might think of, say, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as old, certainly the story of King Arthur and his Round Table as old, most certainly the somewhat boastful stuff that Julius Cæsar wrote as old. But the story of Troy is nearly a thousand years older than any of them.\* About the only other writings comparable—*literature* and not just letters or accounts or magic incantations which were usually the only use that the invention of writing was first put to—are the poems (psalms) of King David or the rather childish fairy-tale adventures of a Babylonian hero called Gilgamesh. Just imagine it: here through all the wars and upheavals and changes of most of the world's history have survived the words of three thousand years ago.

But we have left out the answer to the question, *where* is Troy? The map on page 11 gives the answer. Troy lies on the north-western tip of that great bulge which overshadows the eastern end of the Mediterranean, which is called Asia Minor, and which looks a little like the profile of

\* Siege of Troy, about 1200 B.C.; Homer, about 800 B.C.



Map I: Greece and Troy

■ hornless rhinoceros. Troy is just about where the horn ought to be; it lies at the mouth of the narrow channel, called today the Dardanelles and by the Greeks the Hellespont, that lets the Aegean Sea run into the Sea of Marmara, through the Bosphorus, and so into the Black Sea with its many mouths of great rivers and its fertile shores. It is a strange thing that when the waters at the end of the Ice Ages rushed in and made of the Mediterranean Sea two large lakes they should have left openings at both ends; so easily, one would imagine, could Asia have remained joined on to Europe. And that would have altered history considerably and perhaps stopped there ever being a story of Troy at all.

Which consideration brings in ourselves, ordinary people as opposed to the poets and the playwrights and the painters and the romancers who, it seems, through the ages have never been able to let the story of Troy alone. It may be romantic and thrilling, we may well object, but has it any real importance?

At least the Greeks always thought so: if you read another book in this series, *Finding Out About the Athenians*, you will see how no one left school without having learnt great lumps of Homer's epic poems by heart. More immediately, if you look at the map you can probably guess at Troy's importance yourself. If not, you will have my word for it that it was; and I hope you will agree by the time you have reached the end of the book.

Even so, there is one rather horribly disturbing thought which may remain with us. It is this: let the poets be excited, let the ancient town have been built in an important position; but is the story of the siege of Troy *true*? Maybe it is no more than a story, a fairy tale, a fable. In which case . . .

That is a doubt which worried people for a long time. It has only been resolved gradually, in the last eighty years or so. And in the process of doing away with that doubt a truly staggering amount has been learned. Our great-grandfathers (only one "great") knew pretty well all there was to know about "classical" Greece, the Greece of Solon, Pericles, and Plato and wise, heroic Socrates. They did not even suspect the existence of a Greek world of Shaft Graves and Tholos Tombs and Linear Scripts and "Troy VIIA", the Troy that the archaeologists believe with good reason was the real Troy of the legend.

The truth about the Trojans then; that is what this book sets itself to find out—and meaning by "the Trojans" all those who fought on the windy plains of Troy, whether they paid allegiance to venerable King Priam or to moody Achilles and wily Odysseus. In truth they must have all been very much of the same "Aryan" stock, all racially ancestral to the Greeks of later times. Not that this prevented them from fighting each other. . . .



## 2

### LEGEND

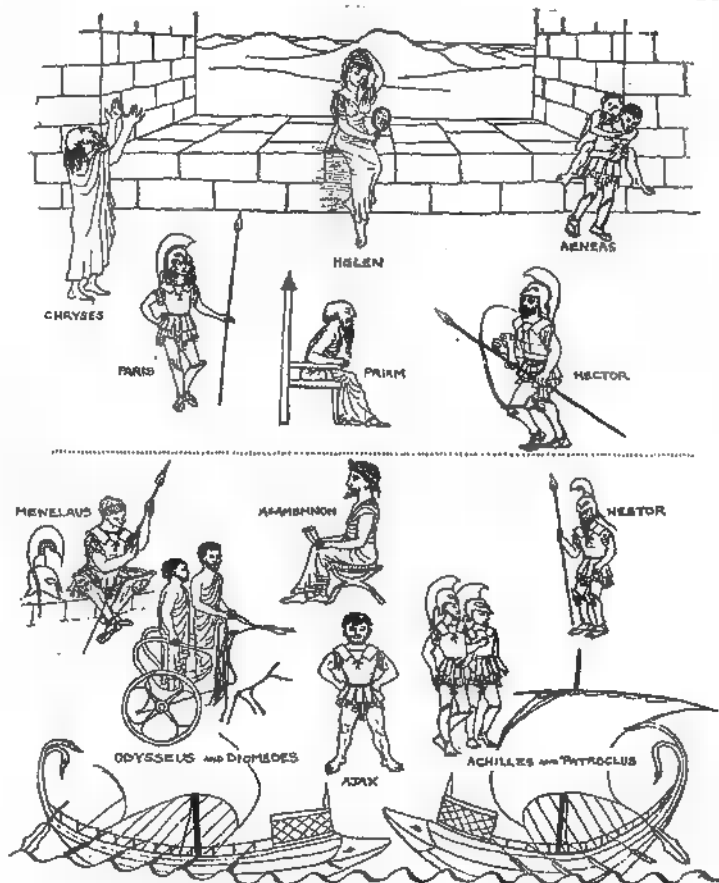
**N**O DECENTLY educated person can go through life without running up, time and again, against allusions to Troy and its heroes. The trouble is that nowadays we are not often taught about such things. "Some," says the song:

Some speak of Alexander and some of Hercules  
Of Hector and Lysander and such great men as  
these.

But in plain fact very few people do so speak—and quite a few would be hard put to it to spot out of that quartet of heroes the Trojan one. The best thing we can do therefore is to retell the tale—and not only that but also, since a string of names is confusing, to begin, as a play does, with a list of the principal people concerned, the *dramatis personae*. Here then is a sort of picture-diagram, with some short sketches in words to back up the sketches in pencil.

#### 1. *On the Trojan Side.*

**HELEN.** The cause of all the trouble. Sometimes described as "hyacinth haired", that is black-



Trojans and Greeks: the characters in the Trojan war

haired—blue-black and shining. Homer says that when she walked on the walls of Troy even the old men stopped to watch her. She was a Greek, but imprisoned—willingly, unwillingly? perhaps she didn't quite know herself—within the walls of Troy.

**PRIAM.** King of the great walled city of Troy and of the lands around. An old man and destined to be a very sad one.

**PARIS.** One of Priam's many sons and the most handsome—indeed the most handsome of men. Brave in sports. The sort of young man who nowadays would go to the best tailor. He wore his hair in "love locks".

**HECTOR.** Another of Priam's sons and his favourite. A tough but noble figure, rather unfairly giving his name to our word "hectoring".

**ÆNEAS.** Second-in-command to Hector. Like Odysseus on the other side, he was destined to do some considerable travelling. You see him here rescuing his ancient father by carrying him on his back.

**CHRYSES.** A Trojan priest, who made difficulties, but not without cause—the Greeks, on a successful foray, had run off with his daughter.

## 2. *On the Greek Side.*

**AGAMEMNON.** Head of the Greek invading army, called "King of Men", that is overlord of the minor barons and princelings who are also sometimes called kings. Not very good at keeping order among them.

**MENELAUS.** The man with a genuine grievance. Described as red-haired. King of Sparta, husband of Helen, and brother of Agamemnon.

**ACHILLES.** The man with not quite such a genuine grievance, though he makes the most

of it. Chief of the Myrmidons. A terrible warrior, and moody at that. Described as golden-haired, and as a swift runner.

ODYSSEUS. The wily man, the schemer, but the brave man as well. The great adventurer and traveller of all time—Homer surely likes him the best. Known to the Romans, and to us, as ULYSSES.

PATROCLUS. The brave and true friend of Achilles.

NESTOR. The old man on the Greek side; the wise counsellor, though rather wordy.

AJAX and DIOMEDES. Two more Greek warriors who shared the reputation of being second in bravery only to Achilles. Ajax (in Greek Aias) was something of a rival of Odysseus, but Diomedes was Odysseus' friend and went on a dangerous spying expedition with him.

Now one thing before we tell the story. I have made these characters sound very human—at least I hope I have; it is not difficult to do so, for they are made human by the original author. That is the wonderful thing: Homer's characters in the *Iliad*\* are real people, utterly human with human strengths and frailties: they "come alive" as surely as do Hamlet or Becky Sharp or Mr Pickwick or Mr Polly. This fact however has not always been so apparent to the readers of

\* Or the story of the fall of *Ilium*, which is the proper name for Troy, the capital city of the land of the Trojans.



King Menelaus of Sparta had married Princess Helen of neighbouring Argos, which was all as it should be. A lovely daughter, Hermione, had been born to them, which was also all as it should be. But Prince Paris of Troy was on his travels, or his maraudings—rather as the sons of Vikings went on their maraudings—and Paris had been promised by the goddess Aphrodite the fairest woman on earth for his wife. (This business of the interference of the gods is always coming into the Greek stories and it makes understanding a little difficult; we shall have more to say of this later.)

Along comes Paris, then, to the court of King Menelaus, and is received with all the lavish and generous hospitality that it was the custom of courts of those early Greek days to bequeath. Generosity, however, did not extend to the giving away of wives. Paris simply took what he wanted. He ran off with a bewitched and willing Helen. Menelaus ran off to his elder brother and overlord, up at Mycenae, and complained bitterly: "We can't allow this sort of thing!" King Agamemnon agreed. He sent his call out far and wide, to all the lands where Greeks lived, not only to such nearby islands as rocky Ithaca where Odysseus ruled but to distant Rhodes and Crete. The Greeks obeyed the call; and slowly but surely in the Bay of Argos the fleet grew and made its preparations to sail.

It was a long siege, very long; tradition makes

it ten years. We can discount that a little if we like. But perhaps most of the Greeks went home each winter; perhaps men did not mind being away from home in those days, so long that is as they could support themselves on someone else's land. Yet even the Greeks were growing tired and despairing by the ninth year. That is where Homer's story begins.

There had been, as we have said, a successful foray into one of the Trojan villages, and the Greeks had come back with booty which included slave girls. As was the custom, these had been doled out to the Chiefs. Achilles got a girl called Briseis. Agamemnon got one called Chryseis.

Chryseis was called after her father, and this was where Agamemnon made his mistake. For Chryseis' father was Chryses, and Chryses was a priest of Apollo, who should on that account have been immune from such treatment and such insults. He came in fact and told King Agamemnon so—and got, as they say, a dusty answer.

Agamemnon *kept* the girl Chryseis. Result: the just retribution of the gods, which was a plague amongst the ranks of the Greeks. Odysseus in due course called a council of the great ones to consider the matter. And that was where the terrible quarrel started and Achilles' wrath was kindled with such near-fatal results for the Greeks.

Agamemnon begins the meeting by making a

proposal. He will indeed hand back his girl Chryseis to her holy father, and so appease the god and with any luck get rid of the plague. But he, as King of all the kings and head of the expedition, can hardly be left without a slave girl as booty while there were any others about: it wouldn't be proper. He will therefore take, as substitute, Achilles's girl Briseis. Achilles, at this, is absolutely scandalized. Listen to what he has to say in Mr Rieu's translation:

"You shameless schemer," he cried, "always aiming at ■ profitable deal! How can you expect any of the men to give you loyal service when you send them on a raid or into battle? It was no quarrel with the Trojan spearmen that brought *me* here to fight. They have never done *me* any harm. They have never lifted cow or horse of mine, nor ravaged any crop that the deep soil of Phthia\* grows to feed her men; for the roaring seas and many a dark range of mountains lie between us. The truth is that we joined the expedition to please you; yes, you unconscionable cur, to get satisfaction from the Trojans for Menelaus and yourself—a fact which you utterly ignore. And now comes this threat from you of all people to rob me of my prize, my hard-earned prize, which was a tribute from the ranks. It is not as though I am ever given as much as you when the Achaeans sack some

\* Or Phthiotas, in Thessaly of North Greece, Achilles' kingdom.



thriving city of the Trojans. The heat and burden of the fighting falls on me, but when it comes to dealing out loot, it is you that take the lion's share, leaving me to return exhausted from the field with something of my own, however small. So now I shall go back to Phthia. That is the best thing I can do—to sail home in my beaked ships. I see no point in staying here to be insulted while I pile up wealth and luxuries for you.”

All Agamemnon can do in reply is to taunt Achilles as a coward—the “King of Men” has no tact whatever. The two nearly come to blows, only Achilles’ goddess-mother, Thetis—we might say it was his conscience or what is left of his common sense—making him return to his scabbard his half-drawn sword.

It is Nestor, the old and wise counsellor, who patches up the quarrel. Indeed, even he can hardly patch it, only stop it from growing worse. Achilles agrees to let his girl Briseis go, agrees too that he will not go home. But by all the gods he will not fight! Let the King and the Greeks see how they can get on without him. The day will come when they will tear their hair out with remorse for having treated the best man in the expedition with contempt! . . .

And so now what is going to happen? Now the gods take a hand and help lure the Greeks to near-destruction. They send King Agamem-

non a dream, a dream wherein he is told that there has come his great chance to go in and win. With Briseis duly taken from Achilles, with the other girl sent back to her priestly father and so the plague amongst the Greeks duly checked, the leader feels himself in ■ good position. He manages to persuade his peers that the augury of his dream is true.

There follows a curious but quite credible incident. Agamemnon, no doubt fearing disaffection amongst others of his troops besides Achilles and his Myrmidons, decides to test the army. He has them assembled and tells them he has decided to go home. The result is appalling. "Good!" says everybody in effect, and starts clambering on board. It takes all the cleverness of Odysseus to stop them. To the noble he addresses honeyed words and appeals to their nobility, to the base he gives the rough edge of his tongue; to Thersites the arch-grouser of the expedition—one can't help imagining him talking with ■ cockney whine—he offers threat of violence. Finally the army changes its mind, as eager now to fight as a little while ago it had been to run.

The great, the decisive, battle is therefore prepared. The Trojans come out from their city and stand before their walls; the two hosts face each other.

Then comes what is to us another surprising incident, but one fully in line with what we know of fighting in a heroic age. It is rather reminiscent of the episode of David and Goliath

—though it is to prove not half so decisive in its outcome. Paris, in one of his brave moods, challenges Menelaus, the man from whom he has taken Helen, to mortal combat, the result to decide the whole war\*. Menelaus accepts, and everyone agrees to the scheme with alacrity. But first there must be a solemn sacrifice made and an oath taken to abide by the result. Old King Priam is sent for—he is up on the walls of Troy surveying the scene and having the leaders of the Greeks pointed out to him by Helen. He comes down.

So, in front of the opposing armies, the leaders of the two sides make their solemn sacrifice and vow: the lambs' throats cut, the wine poured out on the earth as a libation, Zeus the thunderer and the all-seeing sun invoked as witnesses.

Then the space is cleared for the two champions. Clad in their shining bronze, each armed with spear and sword and enormous shield, with the horsehair plumes of their helmets nodding, the heroes appear on the scene. The armies sit down to watch.

There is really a temptation to laugh at this affair: it is so grim and yet so human and at times almost childish. The two go through the ritual. They brandish their weapons. Then first one has a go with his spear. It is Paris. Mene-

\* Herodotus, Greek historian and also teller of good stories, writes of another such challenge to combat—threefold, between ■ man and ■ man, a horse and ■ horse, and a dog and ■ dog!

laos receives it on his shield, and it does not penetrate. Now Menelaus. He throws with more force and the spear penetrates and tears Paris's clothing, the young man escaping worse damage by a skilful swerve. Then the next stage. Each rushes forward with his sword. Menelaus's sword crashes down on his rival's helmet. It breaks! He groans, complains to the gods, and in an ecstasy of rage leaps on Paris and grabs him by the crest of his helmet. By this he starts to drag him away. Paris is half choked. But Aphrodite, who is always kind to Paris, intervenes and makes the strap of the helmet break. Menelaus finds himself with only the helmet in his hand, and in disgust throws it away. When he turns back there is no Paris. Aphrodite has made him disappear—in modern idiom, you might say, you couldn't see Paris for dust. He goes back to Helen, who upbraids him for cowardice, but in the end forgives him. But this great occasion which was to end the war has ended in fiasco. . . .

There is another temptation that we must avoid, which is to recount the story at too great length. The detail however is often so revealing: of the way these people—that is if they were ever real people—must have lived and thought.

Put shortly then, Menelaus claims the victory over Paris but is not accorded it. Then a rash Trojan breaks the truce by shooting his arrow at Menelaus and wounding him. That is a signal for a general fight. And a fierce and tough and

bloody fight it is. We are not spared the details. Many a brave man on both sides sees no longer the light of the day, and falls, and "bites the dust". The gods, who have long ago taken sides in this great war, watch and encourage and even take part—Aphrodite, protecting this time another Trojan, Aeneas, even gets wounded herself, much to her annoyance. The battle sways, but seems on the whole to be favouring the Greeks. Hector exhorts his men, and tells them he will go back into Troy and ask their wives and mothers to pray for them.

Back in the city Hector first meets his brother Paris, and tells him what he thinks of him. Then he meets his wife Andromache. Hector seems to have a premonition of death, though in fact his time is not yet. Before returning to the fight, he bids a sad farewell to his weeping wife and his baby boy:

As he finished, glorious Hector held out his arms to take his boy. But the child shrank back with a cry to the bosom of his girdled nurse, alarmed by his father's appearance. He was frightened by the bronze of the helmet and the horsehair plume that he saw nodding grimly down at him. His father and his lady mother had to laugh. But noble Hector quickly took his helmet off and put the dazzling thing on the ground. Then he kissed his son, dandled him in his arms, and prayed to Zeus and the other gods: "Zeus, and you other gods,

grant that this boy of mine may be, like me, pre-eminent in Troy; as strong and brave as I; a mighty king of Ilium. May people say, when he comes back from battle, 'Here is a better man than his father.' ”

Then Hector goes out to fight again—and repeats the challenge of mortal combat that his brother had made and disgraced.

Again there comes an incident curious in our eyes, another fall from high heroics. Hector has a greater reputation than his brother Paris, and it is only with some hesitation that Menelaus accepts the challenge. Not only that, but the others restrain him. This is a serious business; they will therefore draw lots to decide who shall fight the redoubtable Hector. They do so, each “marking his own lot” with his particular sign (not signature; they are illiterate) and casting it into a helmet. The sign of the redoubtable Ajax comes out. Ajax arms himself; the ritual is gone through again; the fight begins. And this time it is a longer and more equal affair. They even get down to throwing rocks at each other. Finally both by mutual agreement give up—the *light is getting poor*.

There ensued a night of rest and food and a burying of the dead. On the next day, decision by single combat having been abandoned or forgotten, a more real decision began to appear likely: the Trojans, who the evening before had even talked of giving up the struggle, this day

definitely won the advantage. The turn of fortune that Achilles, sulking in his tent and "nursing his anger", had been half hoping, half fearing, was now coming to pass: the Trojans, advancing, had reached almost to the Grecian ships. When little more than the fall of night had saved them from disaster, the Greek leaders held a glum and anxious council of war.

There was only one solution that anyone could think of, and that was a deputation to Achilles to ask him for heaven's sake to stop being angry. The deputation was to carry stronger inducements than mere words. Agamemnon, now heartily sorry for his bludgeoning tactics in the episode of Chryseis and Briseis, offered the following compensations:

Seven tripods, untarnished by the flames

Ten talents of gold\*

Twenty cauldrons of gleaming copper

Twelve powerful, prize-winning racehorses

Seven women skilled in fine crafts

The return of Briseis

A rich share of the spoils if Troy is won

The choice of Agamemnon's daughters in marriage, and the gift of seven towns if they all return safely.

That, one might well say, was something. Ajax and Odysseus are chosen to take the message and the offer. They go with some trepidation.

\* Something like £10,000.



A later idea: Greek vase showing Achilles and Odysseus playing chess

They find Achilles singing to himself on the lyre—about famous men. They are welcomed and entertained to a good meal, Achilles' friend Patroclus cutting up the joints and cooking them on the spot. Then at length the proposal is made. And Achilles leaves them in no doubt whatever about his answer:

"As for his gifts, I like them just as little as I like the man himself. Not if he offered me ten times or twenty times as much as he possesses or could raise elsewhere . . . not if his gifts were as many as the grains of sand or particles of dust, would Agamemnon win me over!"

Achilles in fact expresses his intention of



sailing for home and taking his contingent with him. No appeals, no arguments, will make him change his mind; for once the nimble wits of Odysseus are wasted. Well, perhaps he won't actually go home—though he might!—that is the sole concession they can wring out of Achilles. They go back to report. There is nothing left to the anxious Greek leaders but to fight on without the aid of their champion, and meanwhile to get some sleep.

Sleep however they cannot command. The camp fires of the Trojans, so close to them, are too menacing. Restless, once more the leaders find themselves together. Perhaps something, they agree, can be done to help. What about sending a spy into the enemy lines?—something might be learnt of the Trojans' intentions. The resourceful Odysseus again volunteers for the job, and this time his friend Diomedes goes with him.

In fact the crafty but bloodthirsty pair do no spying whatever. But they do have an exciting and satisfactory time, satisfactory to themselves. On the way they meet ■ Trojan nobleman who has been sent by Hector on exactly the same sort of mission in reverse. Putting the fear of God into him, or rather the fear of Odysseus and Diomedes, they make him tell which is the weakest part of the Trojan line, and then they incontinently kill him, stripping the poor corpse of its armour—one always stripped one's conquered enemy of his armour, if there was time and opportunity—setting it aside for picking up

on the return journey. Then the intended reconnaissance turns into a daring and bloody raid. A certain King Rhesus, no relation to the monkey but the owner of ■ rich chariot and a quite wonderful pair of pure white horses, is surprised in his sleep. He and half his retinue are killed and the daring pair harness the horses and dash away with their booty—not forgetting the extra perquisites of the dead man's armour on the way back. Perhaps the escapade did something to raise the morale of the Greeks and to lower that of the Trojans. . . .

Certainly on the next day the Trojans did not start with much success. But then Agamemnon is seen to be wounded, and the Trojans respond to Hector's rallying. From having retreated almost to their walls they now advance and threaten the trench and wall that the Greeks have dug to protect their fleet of ships. In this terrible day most of the Greek leaders are wounded. The Trojans have only to cross the trench, batter down the hastily built wall, set fire to the ships, and the Greeks will have no hope left, with even their line of retreat cut off.

Two things cheat the Trojans of immediate victory, one modern-sounding, the other the reverse, one folly and the other superstition. The folly is that a certain proud Trojan king, scorning to leave his chariot, chases the Greeks and finds himself cut off from support by his too rash advance. The Trojans witness his defeat. Then their superstition is aroused because they

also see an eagle appearing from the left. Any bird appearing from the left is a sinister omen; but this eagle is bitten by the snake he is carrying in his talons, so that the snake is released and falls to the ground just before the Trojans, and that indeed is a strange and terrible thing to witness. Hector pooh-poohs the omen, and doubles his efforts so that he may counteract its effect. He crosses the Greek trench, pierces their wall. Agamemnon begins to talk of giving up the struggle. But then the Trojans suffer something more physically damaging. Ajax takes up a great boulder and heaving it at Hector hits him in the chest. Hector is carried from the battlefield unconscious.

Back over the trench again, right back, with the Greeks pursuing, the Trojans retreat to their line of chariots.

And then another sway in the battle. Hector, spitting blood, recovers consciousness; receives encouragement and strength from the gods; rallies his troops. This time they actually reach the ships. Hector is climbing on board and shouting for fire with which to set the fleet ablaze.

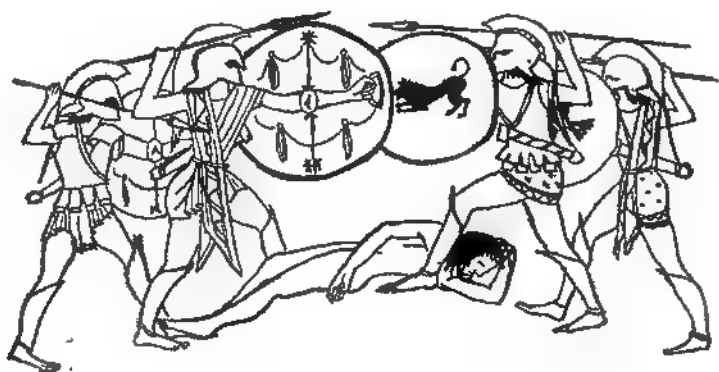
Things indeed look black for the Greeks. But now, at this moment, comes the true turning point of the battle. Patroclus can bear inactivity no longer. He rushes to his lord and master: if Achilles will not fight then at least he must let his friend and his men!

Achilles agrees. The Myrmidons are called out. Not only that but Patroclus, leading them, shall appear in the armour of Achilles.

With his battle cry, with his taunts, in the shining armour and behind the noble horses of Achilles, Patroclus is irresistible. The Trojans retreat, and Hector with them. Right back to the walls of Troy they go, right back to the Scaean Gate.

But Patroclus has too many enemies. His helmet, that is Achilles' helmet, is knocked off. Hector advances, and with one great spear thrust gives Patroclus his mortal wound. Crying that he will be avenged, Patroclus dies. The Greeks and their ships have been saved. But the friend of Achilles lies before the Scaean Gate, lifeless and stripped of his armour. . . .

The wrath of Achilles is now terrible. Before, it had been resentful, smouldering; now it is



Fighting over the body of Patroclus

virulent and blazing. He arms himself with new armour. He seeks out Hector, and in a terrific duel finally kills him. Still his anger is unappeased. Corpses may be stripped of their armour; but they are sacred, they are always handed over for burial by their friends. But not so for Achilles. Brutally he ties Hector's body to his chariot and drags it time and again around the walls of Troy. The Trojans have to watch; Hector's father, King Priam, has to watch.

At last the King can bear it no longer. Risking his own life, he seeks out Achilles, and begs for the body of his son.

Now finally the last particle of Achilles's bitter and terrible anger is melted. The old man's supplications reduce the cruel soldier to tears. The two weep together; Achilles grants King Priam his wish. Homer's *Iliad* ends at this—with descriptions of the funeral rites of Greek Patroclus and Hector, Prince of Troy. . . .

# 3

## THE WOODEN HORSE, AND YOUNG HENRY

SO, RATHER rapidly, have we finished the story of Homer's *Iliad*. But as everyone knows, that is not the whole of the story of Troy. Homer tells something of it, in rather an incidental sort of way, in his account of the wanderings and final return from Troy of Odysseus, *The Odyssey*. Other Greek dramatists and historians repeat the story as it had been handed down to them; and finally along came the Latin poet Vergil to recount it fully in his story of another hero's wanderings, the Trojan Aeneas. As we shall see shortly, it was this story that fired the young imagination of the man destined to be the first to make modern sense out of the ruins of Troy.

After the death and solemn burial of Hector and Patroclus, the Greeks and Trojans were pretty well back where they started, that is to say at stalemate. The only difference was that both sides were exhausted, desperate, and no doubt full of hate for each other. Soon Achilles was killed by an arrow from Paris; and Paris in his turn met his death.

Meanwhile Odysseus was scheming, always scheming—always too, apparently, thinking of ways to play upon the superstition of the Trojans. One story is that he and Diomedes made another expedition, less bloody but more subtle, and managed to steal away from Troy its prized image of the Goddess Athene. That ought to have discouraged them! But it did not seem to discourage them enough. . . .

Odysseus thought and tried again—this adventure is recounted in *The Odyssey*. The brave and wily man got himself disguised as a down-trodden and maltreated slave. Then he penetrated into Troy again. He prowled around, and no doubt took the pulse of the city, sought out the feeling of its people. Helen alone recognized him—and persuaded him to come back with her, to have his sores dressed and his stomach filled.

That meeting must have been a strange and fascinating one: the man and the woman, the soldier and the eternal enchantress. But Odysseus was a good deal more than a simple soldier: he did not get his head split open by a tent-peg, as did Sisera by Jael. Nonetheless, he was playing a dangerous game. Having discovered that Helen was more than a little tired of living with the Trojans, he unfolded his plans to her, and no doubt enlisted her help.

Then he went back—and prevailed upon the Greeks to put his plan into action. They built a colossal hollow wooden horse; and left it,

filled with warriors, and with one brave man outside to tell a false story.

They really departed. The black ships, the hollow ships of the Greeks that Hector had made such great but unavailing efforts to storm and burn, set sail and disappeared. They left behind emptiness and silence. In reality they sailed no farther than the nearby island of Tenedos, and something much more sinister than silence had been left behind.

Helen came out to view the wooden horse. She knew the secret. And now she seems to have played the double traitress, or in fact triple traitress. She had one of her many brothers-in-law with her—some say she was now his wife. The couple wandered round three times, and Helen every now and then knocked on the hollow horse's reverberating sides. How the Greek leaders within must have cursed and trembled. But they kept quiet. Then she mocked them. She called out to Menelaus—in her own voice. No answer. But she was a very good mimic. To Odysseus, to Diomedes, it seemed that their wives too were calling out to them. Then it was the turn of a rash young hero called Antichus. He wanted to shout in reply. But Odysseus clapped his hand over the silly fellow's mouth just in time. Helen and her escort retired, foiled in their effort to give the game away.

And now came the Trojans. It must have been ■ sort of happy sightseeing tour for them. Look, this is where the redoubtable Achilles had his



camp, and his atrocious Myrmidons! And what was this, this colossal horse—this statue, this lovely idol. The Trojans doted on horses, they were called “the tamers of horses”.

“Let’s take her inside!” they said.

Others were more sensible, one in particular, and a priest at that. Laocoon looked up, and said, succinctly: “I distrust the Greeks, especially when they bring gifts.”

Then he thrust a spear into the horse’s side.

Odysseus must have done some more clapping of hands over mouths then.

He was lucky anyway. Just then the rest of his plan bore fruit. There appeared the spy whom they had left behind and who had allowed himself to be captured. He was made to tell his story before the king.

Indeed, he was only too anxious to tell his story, and he told it very well. This horse, he made it clear, was a *Greek* horse, and very precious; the Greeks had built it before leaving as a propitiation to the gods. And he himself? He had been intended as a final human sacrifice. That of course was Odysseus’ idea. And *he* had been chosen because Odysseus bore ■ grudge against him.

The spy—he was a brave man and he deserves to have his name mentioned: it was Sinon—here broke off. But why should he tell any more? He was a Greek, and of course the Trojans would want to kill a Greek. Get on with it then! Odysseus would be so very pleased.

That was a cunning move. What, do what the hated Odysseus wanted them to do! "No! Go on with your story!"

Sinon did. He embroidered it. That stealing of the Trojan effigy of Athene, for instance, that had been a bad move. It had brought the Greeks worse luck than ever. So now they had all given up the game and really gone home, and this great effigy had been built to bring them luck again. And why so big? Obvious! Too big ever to go through the gates of Troy and bring the *Trojans* luck.

The Trojans and silly old King Priam wavered. And then, so the story goes, a terrible omen clinched the matter. A great serpent came out of the sea and attacked Laocoon's two little boys. All their father's strength and struggling could not save them. Laocoon, obviously, was being punished for his desecration of the wonderful wooden horse. "Bring it *in*, then! We can get it through the gates somehow! Knock down the walls if necessary!"

Probably it went through easily enough. But it had been a near thing for the intrepid, and cramped, warriors within.

That night they issued forth. The Greeks, well timing their return from Tenedos, were ready to enter when the men who had stolen out from the wooden horse opened to them the Gates of Troy. . . .

For the rest of the story the central figure becomes Aeneas, leader of the Trojans now that

Hector was dead. All is fire and blood and terror. The Trojans, surprised in their sleep, have not ■ chance. Aeneas witnesses a son of dead Achilles kill a son of Priam before the old man's very eyes and then kill the king himself. The king's daughter Cassandra is dragged by the hair shrieking, no one taking any more notice of her shrieks than they had in the past of her prophecies. Andromache's baby boy is hurled from the battlements; Andromache herself is led away into slavery, as she had had a premonition would be her fate.

Some of the Trojans under Aeneas manage to kill a few Greeks. They dress in their armour, and by this ruse kill some more Greeks. But then their own side mistake them for enemies. All is confusion. Aeneas realizes that the only hope is escape. He goes back to his home, and leads out his wife and child and aged father. Father is so aged that he has to ride pick-a-back on Aeneas. In ■ moment of panic they all run for it; when that danger is over Aeneas' wife has disappeared. Distracted, the Trojan hero searches burning Troy for her. It is of no use: she is already dead. Sad, distraught, stumbling, his little boy by his side, the burden of his father on his back, Aeneas escapes through the flames and the fighting.

“Escapes through the flames and the fighting.”  
There was published in 1828 in Germany a *Universal History* by the learned Doctor Georg



The picture that fired young Schliemann's imagination

Ludwig Jerrer, a copy of which was given in the following year as a Christmas present to a little boy of not quite eight years old called Heinrich Schliemann. One of the illustrations showed Aeneas escaping, the sinister wooden horse in the background.

That illustration not only fascinated the boy Henry, but pleased him. For his father had always told him that Troy had been so completely destroyed as to leave no trace behind. When he first saw the picture he cried out:

"Father, you were mistaken: Jerrer must have seen Troy, otherwise he could not have represented it here."

"My son," replied his father, "that is merely a fanciful picture."

"But hadn't Troy such great walls as are shown in this book?"

"Yes!"

"Then, Father, if such walls once existed, they cannot have been completely destroyed. Vast ruins of them must still remain, but they are hidden beneath the dust of ages."

So the grown-up Henry Schliemann recounted the incident of his childhood. Perhaps in reality the young boy did not talk quite so pedantically. Or perhaps on the other hand he did: he was a strange man and may well have been a strange little boy.

The walls of Troy had indeed disappeared "beneath the dust of ages". We come now to the story of the man who did more than anyone else

to bring them to light again. To tell the truth, the middle years of his life are not very interesting, nor do they show the best side of Henry Schliemann. But when he became an archaeologist—though nobody gave the new tribe of diggers and delvers that name yet—his story becomes interesting again, as is that of his childhood. "The child is father to the man", or in other words, what you do as a child and what is done to you, in particular what strikes your imagination, will affect the rest of your life—and particularly so if you are the sort of person our German Henry was, imaginative and romantic but at the same time serious and self-centred and a little ruthless, and what they call literal-minded: if you had told him a tall story and he had seen fit to believe it, nothing on earth, no amount of sweet reasonableness, would have made him change his mind.

Henry heard quite a number of tall and romantic stories when he was young. He was born the son of a Protestant parson in the flat lands of northern Germany that run between the Elbe and the sea. He soon imbibed the legends of the local peasants: his own garden was haunted; just behind the garden was a pond called "das Silberschälchen" or "the Little Silver Bowl", from out of which a maiden was said to rise every night, holding the said bowl; nearby was a mound in which a robber knight had once buried his beloved child in a golden cradle. "My faith in the existence of these

treasures was so great," wrote Henry Schliemann in his own story of his life and his excavations,\* "that, whenever I heard my father complain of his poverty, I always expressed my astonishment that he did not dig up the silver bowl or the golden cradle." There was a half-ruined medieval castle too, that had its splendidly gruesome story. Another robber knight, owner of the castle, had for what he considered sufficient reasons fried one of his servitors alive. Young Henry could see the terrible murderer's grave any day in his father's churchyard, and hear again the local story that the dead man's leg used to stick out, and grow again if you chopped it off. . . .

These were little more than self-frightenings. But the little boy as he grew up did take a real interest in real antiquities. This was the age, you must remember, of the exciting beginning of excavations and serious search for the history of the long past: Pompeii and Herculaneum and the mummies and pyramids of Egypt. Henry's father was interested too, and told his son about them—and, as we know, about the legend of Troy, Henry incidentally always championing the Trojans.

Then Henry found a little girl of his own age who didn't laugh when he would talk of Troy and of all the local legends. The two became fast friends. They attended dancing classes together, and were bad dancers but thrilled if

\* *Ilios, City and Country of the Trojans*, published in 1880.

the class was held in what was left of the robber knight's medieval castle. If held only at the Rectory they would go out hopefully into the churchyard to see if the leg had grown again. They agreed that when they were grown up they would marry and together explore all the mysteries first of their own native village and then of Helen's Troy. That this was more than romantic childishness we shall see.

By the time Henry was nine great trouble came to the family. His father, who was by no means as good as he ought to have been, had helped drive his wife to her grave by his unfaithfulness. She died, and the horrid truth came out that the widower had been carrying on an intrigue with one of the maidservants. Then there came a suspicion about the misuse of church funds. Henry's father finally cleared himself of this charge, though not before he had been dismissed from his parsonage and his job. When he was finally exonerated he refused to become a clergyman again but set up as a merchant with the compensation money he had been given—and did not prove much more of a success in that walk of life either. Young Henry pined for his mother, but pined even more for his little mystery-loving sweetheart Minna Meincke. He was sent away to live with an uncle, and when the final crash came taken away from a good school and sent to the free one where he learnt little.

At fourteen Henry was having to earn his



own living. He became a grocer's assistant. He was hopelessly poor, hopelessly overworked, hopelessly stuck in an uncongenial job. He sold penn'orths and twopenn'orths of salt and butter and candles and potato-whisky. Only one gleam of light: there came along one day a drunken miller's apprentice who had seen better days. In the lilting liquid of the ancient Greek, full of cadences and the lovely sound of vowels, the man recited Homer. "Although I did not understand a syllable," wrote Schliemann later, "the melodious sounds of the words made a deep impression upon me, and I wept bitter tears over my unhappy fate. Three times over did I get him to repeat to me those divine verses, rewarding his trouble with three glasses of whisky, which I bought with the few pence that made up my whole fortune."

So had Henry's enthusiasm been renewed. And a new and more practical purpose had been added: he must learn Greek! Indeed he began to see things clearly, if bitterly. For success in life, for getting what you wanted, you needed two things: education and money. He spent the next twenty-five years and more steadily acquiring both.

First however he needed his lucky chance. It came initially through misfortune. He grew ill, and the heavy work in the shop became too much for him. He moved to Hamburg. Things had to be worse before they were better. After two more unsuccessful grocer's jobs, in desper-

tion he decided to try his fortunes in South America and, through the help of a friend of his dead mother, took the chance to sign on as a cabin-boy on a sailing brig. He at once proceeded—the crew called him a Jonah—to get himself shipwrecked. Climbing exhausted up the beach with the rest of the crew he found himself in Holland, and soon in hospital. The Dutch were kind to him; and so, unbelievably so, were the friends of his mother's friend who had got him the cabin-boy's job and to whom he now wrote for help. A collection was made for him, and soon he received a letter with £20\* in it and an introduction for ■ new job.

Henry Schliemann was started on his career. The new job was one for which he was more fitted, one in which he could use his brains. He became a shipping clerk.

The rest is a success story. Schliemann worked incredibly hard, half starved himself that he might amass both money and learning. He lapped up a knowledge of foreign languages as a puppy laps up milk. From ■ clerk he became a merchant, a merchant in the Baltic making long hard journeys into Russia by sledge. He followed the gold rush into California and became a banker. He grew to be a really rich man—and besides the useful modern languages he learnt ancient Greek.

There was only one setback. At the age of fourteen or so he had seen his sweetheart

\* For present-day values, multiply by about five.

Minna Meincke again: the two had fallen weeping into each other's arms and renewed their vows. Now when he was really grown-up and felt rich enough, he wrote to a friend of the Meincke family about Minna. He was just too late: the news came back that she had recently married another.

Schliemann got over that and went back to amassing money and learning. He had further troubles, but on the whole he prospered. In fact he became ■ very rich man. Soon, he felt, he could stop making money and do what he really wanted to do. But it seemed almost as if the money-making bug had bitten him so deeply that he could not get over the infection. He wanted to get away and yet he didn't—a little more money would be useful. At last in 1868, when he was already 46 years of age, he made the final break and his first journey to the land of Greece and the site of Troy.

## 4

## THE TREASURE OF PRIAM

NATURALLY HENRY SCHLIEMANN—now Dr Schliemann after providing his native University with a thesis which was his autobiography in classical Greek!—was not the first to visit and try to rediscover Troy.

Whether or not he had his aged father on his back, Aeneas undoubtedly left a city utterly gutted and destroyed. Some time later, and slowly, it had come back to life, but never with its former power and glory. Indeed, as the centuries went by Troy seems to have become a little like some of our own modern show places, the inhabitants half living on the tourists and the glories of the past. Only here the tourists were not always so mild and pacific. In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great passed through on his victorious way, and they showed him the shield of Achilles, and, as one great soldier remembering another, he was duly impressed. That is a scene that helps one to an idea of the ancientness of Troy—it is rather as if Napoleon had been shown the shield of William the Conqueror. After Alexander's death his generals built ■ new city on the coast about twenty miles south

of the true Troy or Ilium. The first general called it after himself; but his rival, more loyal, called it after his late master: Alexandria Troas. And this place became much more flourishing than the poor down-at-heel, living-on-its-past original—it was from here that Saint Paul first sailed across to Europe. However, all things decay—unless somebody makes an effort to see that they don't—and as the Roman Empire fell into ruin so did both of these cities in the land of the ancient and now forgotten Trojans. Europe's Dark Age descended. We jump a thousand years and more until interest is revived.

It becomes now the interest of the historian and the historically minded. People are looking—and this applies of course not only to Troy—across a great gap. But if the stones have crumbled the written word remains. Troy has continued through the centuries as a great legend—and become highly embroidered incidentally in the process. When at last, in the seventeenth century, people began to travel abroad for pleasure and instruction, fabled Troy was not likely to go without a visit.

Unfortunately, however, the place had disappeared. And what was worse nobody knew *exactly* where to look for it. Alexandria Troas had not suffered so badly and there were some imposing ruins there; and so for a while the romantic travellers wandered amongst the picturesque decay of these Graeco-Roman pillars

and walls and arches and, Homer in hand, told themselves and each other that here Hector had fought and died and here fair Helen had gazed from the walls. "I affirme nothing certainly," wrote one such traveller, "only I gesse, as another industrious traveller would do . . . that one of these goodly monuments might be the Sepulcher of King Priamus." No great harm was done and they all duly experienced their thrill, but the cause of learning was hardly advanced.

Better things were soon to come. After all, Homer had been pretty specific in his descriptions of the topography of the place, as he had of much else. Troy must be not far from where the Scamander flowed—though of course rivers could change their course in three thousand years—and it had to be reasonably near to the coast. And one piece of Homeric description should surely be helpful, that of two springs of water issuing forth side by side, one hot and one cold. The springs at Bath had run hot since Roman times; why not this spring of Troy for a thousand or so years longer? As Leonard Cottrell puts it in his book about the discoveries of the early Greeks and Cretans\*, the local inhabitants became "accustomed to the sight of learned gentlemen from Europe plunging thermometers into the hillside springs in the hope of finding the two which Homer had described". Two such in fact did seem to comply with the

\* *The Bull of Minos* (Evans Bros. Ltd, 1953)

description—more or less—and as it was near a spot where a rocky hill, called Bali Dagħ, commandingly overlooked the Scamander, most people plumped for this site as the correct one. The only trouble was that it was eight miles as the crow flies from the sea, and the Greeks seem to have got from their ships to the walls of Troy in an hour or less. But still, you couldn't have everything, and perhaps all the Greeks were fast runners as Achilles was supposed to have been! There was another possible site nearer the coast at a place called by the Turks Hissarlik. But the hill was not half so commanding; and there were no hot and cold springs.

One of the first things that Henry Schliemann did was to test anew, and exhaustively, *all* the springs at Bali Dagħ and to show that there were no less than forty-seven of them and all of the same temperature as made no matter: the twin-stream clue was best forgotten. With the *Iliad* in hand he wandered around Hissarlik and taking every hint with strict literalness came to the firm conclusion, the majority opinion of the experts to the contrary, that here and nowhere else was the site of Helen's Troy.

Then after this preliminary survey he did something much less practical and more romantic. Henry Schliemann re-married. His first marriage had not been a success and had ended in divorce. Now he sought the true substitute for his lost Minna who was to have solved the mysteries of Troy at his side. From America

where he had for a time settled he wrote an amazing letter to a Greek friend. "Find me," he said in effect, "a wife":

... I beg you to enclose with your answer the portrait of some beautiful Greek woman. ... She should be poor, but well educated; she must be enthusiastic about Homer and about the rebirth of my beloved Greece. It does not matter whether she knows foreign languages or not. But she should be of the Greek type, with black hair, and, if possible, beautiful. But my main requirement is a good and loving heart!

Suffice it to say that he got what he desired, and perhaps more than he deserved, a young Greek girl who though thirty years his junior was to prove a tireless excavator and a most loyal and loving wife. He nearly lost her at the start; for, being honest and also of peasant stock where such things are the rule, she answered the question why she was willing to marry him with the answer: "Because my parents have told me that you are a rich man!" Schliemann was horrified; but after a dignified letter of explanation from the young girl he forgave her. She had already passed her exam: "When did the Emperor Hadrian come to Athens? What passages of Homer do you know by heart?" With the bride's proud relatives gathered round



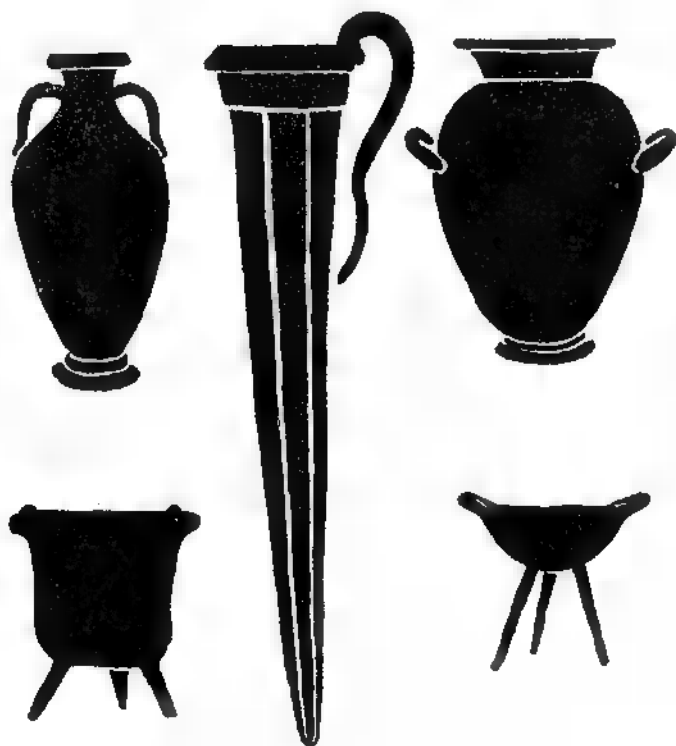
in national costume the two were married. Soon the middle-aged Henry was writing happily that he had found a perfect wife. "I speak only Greek with her, for this is the most beautiful language in the world. It is the language of the gods."

But now to work!

Preferring to argue from the comfort of their desks and armchairs than to dig, people so far had only done a little ineffectual scratching at the probable sites. Schliemann, with the strength of his wealth and of his simple and unshakable faith behind him, went at the job rather like the proverbial bull at a gate. He went up to the hill of Hissarlik, and—employing 80 and then 159 workmen—proceeded to cut a large slice out of it. If he happened to find relics that were not what he wanted he took no notice of them and threw them away—for which act later generations of archaeologists have cursed him. But he immediately began to come across quite exciting finds.

He found fragments of pottery and weapons and tools, and walls upon walls. Literally he found this: there were apparently several Troys, each built upon the ruins of its predecessor!

The job of finding Troy for the world was in fact going to be much more difficult, complicated and troublesome than he had ever thought. But still, what he lacked in knowledge he made up for in enthusiasm. He built himself ■ wooden



"Mycenaean" pots, jugs and cauldrons found by the  
archaeologists

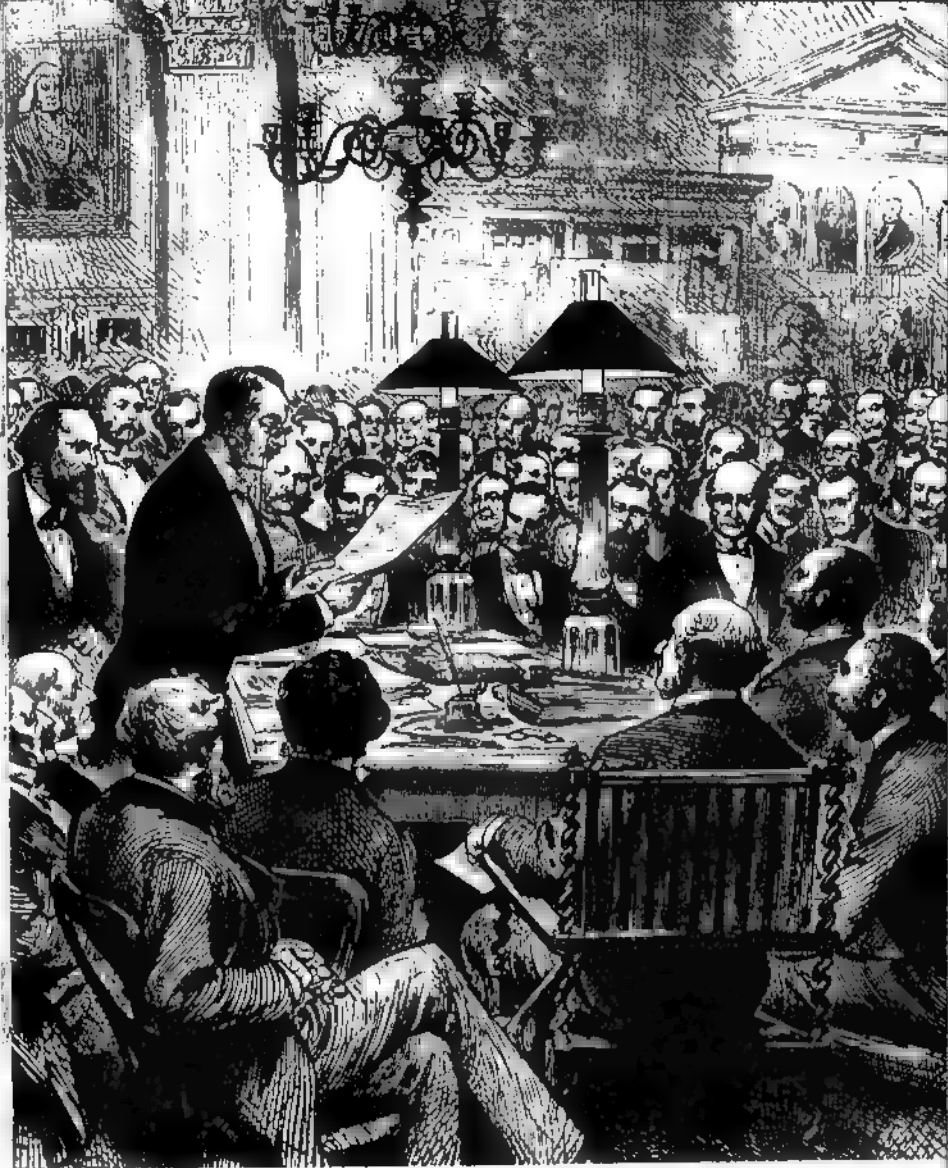
house on the mound of Troy; and there he and his wife laboured, sticking it out. They found the plains of Troy as windy as described and colder in winter and hotter in summer than expected. While his wife Sophie used her delicate fingers to sort out the shards of pottery and the corroded remains of bronze, Schliemann exercised his intelligence and intuition to try to make

some sense out of what he was discovering.

What worried and disappointed him was the fact that the deepest and therefore oldest walls that he discovered were low and small, not at all the sort of thing one would expect after reading the grand and glowing descriptions of Homer. Were the "topless towers" these puny affairs? Surely not! Or was he wrong altogether? No, he couldn't believe that. Or were the oldest walls older even than the Troy of the *Iliad*? This was the early 'seventies of the nineteenth century and Schliemann had no more grown used to the idea than most other people that the ancient world could be in its beginnings vastly older than had ever been expected. He could not therefore believe this last possibility.

Then he did unearth something more imposing. On the south side of the hill his workmen found a great mass of masonry which Schliemann called "the Great Tower". Then, digging westwards, they uncovered what seemed to be a well-paved street, and it was covered with a layer of wood ash and stones that had suffered from fire. Nearby were signs of a double gateway; and working inwards towards the city they found traces of another building; and all must have been once of a reasonably imposing size. Schliemann could hold himself in no longer: he announced to the world that he had found Troy's Scaean Gate, Priam's palace, and the road running between them.

The reception of this news, especially in



Henry Schliemann telling the Society of Antiquaries of his finds.



Sir Arthur Evans, with some of his Minoan finds and the famous cup-bearer fresco behind him.



Michael Ventris, decipherer of the Minoan script.



The windy plains of Troy. Excavations of "Troy VI" and "Troy VII"; house and walls from the time of Helen and before.

Germany, was highly critical. Here was a fool rushing in where angels feared to tread—or couldn't afford to tread—and the angels, in the shape of the academic theorizers, took a very poor view indeed of the whole affair. Schliemann, although he pretended not to be, was discouraged. He had, he wrote, satisfied himself that he had unearthed the site of Helen's Troy, and so now he would stop!

However, no one likes stopping, and most people go on for a bit longer. Henry Schliemann did the same; and as has happened more than once in archaeology he made a big discovery just before he was packing up, in fact the very day before.

He was standing in the early morning watching a few of his workmen dig when his eye caught sight of a big copper object half sticking out of the earth, and behind it—much more exciting—the unmistakable glint of gold. Schliemann made an instant decision: he had not been in the Californian gold rush for nothing. He turned to his wife.

"Go at once and shout 'Paidos'!"

"Paidos" meant "Stop work and have a rest!"

"Now, at seven o'clock?" asked Sophie in surprise.

"Quick. Tell them that today is my birthday, and that I have only just remembered it. Everyone will get his wages. Hurry—shout 'Paidos'!"

Sophie did as she was told; the men drifted gratefully and unsuspectingly away; and Sophie came back for more instructions.



“Go quickly and bring your big shawl!”

They had indeed found ■ great treasure, packed close together in what must have once been ■ wooden chest. Taking no notice of a dangerous overhanging wall, Schliemann feverishly dug it out. There were weapons and perhaps parts of helmets; there were flat slabs of silver (“talents”), there were cups and vases of silver and of gold; and in the largest silver vase a mass of gold trinkets—afterwards there were counted amongst the rest no fewer than 12,271 rings!

Henry dug and Sophie wrapped in her shawl. Then like conspirators the two went back to their wooden house on the top of the hill. The jewellery was sorted out. It included pendant



“The Jewels of Helen”

earrings, and necklaces, and a magnificent diadem with hanging chains of gold. King Priam had always been counted rich in Homer's story. Here was his very treasure, and Henry Schliemann had found it! This was perhaps the supreme moment of his life. Reverently, with hands that trembled, he decked his young wife with the jewellery that he believed had once decked the brows of Helen. . . .

Schliemann, when he came down to earth, had now a double problem on his hands. How to let the scientific world know at once of his discovery—to show it after delay might open the way for suspicion and disbelief—but how at the same time to save the precious find from those Turkish authorities who had given him permission to dig but had more respect for money in hand than archaeology and would almost certainly melt the treasure down if ever they got hold of it? Schliemann, who was pretty well as crafty as Odysseus, was quite equal to the situation. He invited the experts to inspect. But when the Turks, inevitably getting wind of the event, came to collect the treasure there was no sign of it. This was where Sophie's tribe of relations came in handy: the stuff was hidden in their various houses and cottages and barns and stables.

Henry Schliemann had come off best. But he had deeply offended the Turkish authorities in the process.

# 5

## THE FACE OF A KING

IT WAS Sophie who first saw the glint of gold this time. Her husband, sick of the difficulties thrown in his way by the Turks, had transferred his attention to another site altogether, to Mycenae.

But it was not only annoyance that had decided Schliemann to leave Troy. Mycenae was no second-best substitute; it was the rest of the picture, the reverse side of the coin. For from here, as we know, had come the leader of the Greek expedition, that "King of Men", Agamemnon. Mycenae, standing like Troy in a strategic position, with the highway of the sea on one side and the fertile plains of Argos and the land of Sparta (where Helen came from) on the other, was likely to have been a wealthy and important city—"rich in gold" Homer had called it. Then there were two other attractions for Schliemann, or for anyone else for that matter who knew his classical literature and wanted to dig up the past. First, Mycenae showed still some romantic ruins, indeed some most impressive ruins—there was no doubt at all about where the site of Agamemnon's capital lay. Secondly

the legends that clustered around Agamemnon on his return home were almost as romantic and exciting as the story of Troy itself.

Not many of the heroes returning from Troy had been, according to the stories, very lucky. About the only welcome Odysseus met when he at last returned to the Isle of Ithaca was from his ancient dog, and he had had to shoot all the importunate wooers of his wife Penelope before he could get any peace and quiet. Agamemnon was not even as lucky as that. *His* wife, Clytemnestra, had taken a new husband already—and had hated Agamemnon from the time he had left her.

She had had some cause to hate him. When at the beginning the great Greek fleet was waiting in harbour to set sail for Troy it had been deemed fit to make a sacrifice to the gods for a safe and successful journey. And as the gods seemed to be angry and to have laid on a calm which prevented the fleet from sailing at all it was thought that a particularly impressive sacrifice was needed. Further, because a presumptuous act on Agamemnon's part—the gods were always catching humans out in presumptuous acts—was believed to have caused the gods' inconvenient annoyance, it seemed reasonable that the sacrifice be something of Agamemnon's. That something, the priest suggested, should be the king's own daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon agreed; and his wife, who loved her daughter if not her husband, hated him from that moment.

That of course is a gruesome story. But such things have happened among primitive societies and these early and ancient Greeks were primitive. This part of the legend as a matter of fact has a happier ending, to the effect that the goddess Artemis at the last moment substituted a deer for Iphigenia, who escaped. Her mother does not seem to have known about this, however.

Clytemnestra obviously had no desire whatever to see her husband back. The fall of Troy was to be signalled to the homeland by a string of beacon fires, and Clytemnestra made sure that there was always a watchman on the walls of lofty Mycenae. At last the glad but in this case dreaded message appeared. Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus put their no doubt long-matured plans into operation. Agamemnon and his knights were royally feasted; then when relaxed and unsuspecting they were murdered. Some say that the Queen killed Agamemnon



From a Mycenaean bead-seal: Orestes's revenge

herself, in his bath. In either case a miserable end to an epic adventure. Nor is this the end of the tragedy. Electra, another of Agamemnon's daughters, saves her young brother Orestes from the carnage; later he returns and achieves revenge, and kills both his murderous stepfather and his bloody-minded mother. The act sends him mad. . . .

So the legend. And here at Mycenae, for the romantic but realistic-minded Schliemann to ponder upon, was the site where its tragic ending must have been enacted. Here were walls that the later Greeks called Cyclopean, made of such huge stones that it seemed only Cyclops who were giants could have built with them. Here was still standing the imposing entrance to the castle, the famous Lion Gate, with a lintel below the effigies of the rampant lions so immense that it put the lintels of our Stonehenge, of which it is reminiscent, in the shade. Here, too, outside the walls, are imposing "tholos" or beehive tombs, surely the graves of great kings.\*

Schliemann had, too, something more to go on than the old legend. A later Graeco-Roman geographer, Pausanias—he has been called the first guide-book writer—had visited Mycenae about A.D. 120 and had left behind a commentary

\* *Tholos* is Greek for a vault. These vaults are most beautifully and skilfully built and look just like ■ colossal old-fashioned beehive. They have a stone-built passageway, and are reminiscent on the one hand of the Egyptian pyramids and on the other of the passage graves and barrows of the "megalith builders" who visited our own shores and those of half Europe. *Finding Out About Stone Age Britain*, in the same series ■ this book, tells about these.

on the walls and tombs. Schliemann was of course not the first to consider this description. But he was the first to consider it with that mixture of simple "literal-mindedness" and good down-to-earth horse sense which was particularly his own.

Now Pausanias had said that he had been shown tombs and graves at Mycenae, and that they were in fact those of the actors in the great drama that we have sketched: Clytemnestra and Aegisthus were buried outside the walls as being unholy persons, but the rest were inside. That should have been plain enough. But those who preceded Schliemann—and our own Lord Elgin was one of them, he following his usual practice of taking a piece home to the British Museum—were too clever. They looked at the space within the great walls of the citadel or castle, saw that this was so small and rocky and steeply sloping as to make a cemetery therein highly improbable, and came to the conclusion that Pausanias must have been talking of an *outer* wall. They looked therefore at the beehive tombs that were within this outer wall, found them all already rifled by tomb robbers of the past, and came away none the wiser but satisfied that no one would ever come away wiser than they.

And that of course is where they were wrong.

Schliemann was undoubtedly lucky, though he deserved to be. No really ancient grave has ever preserved its treasures from tomb robbers unless some chance has from a pretty early date

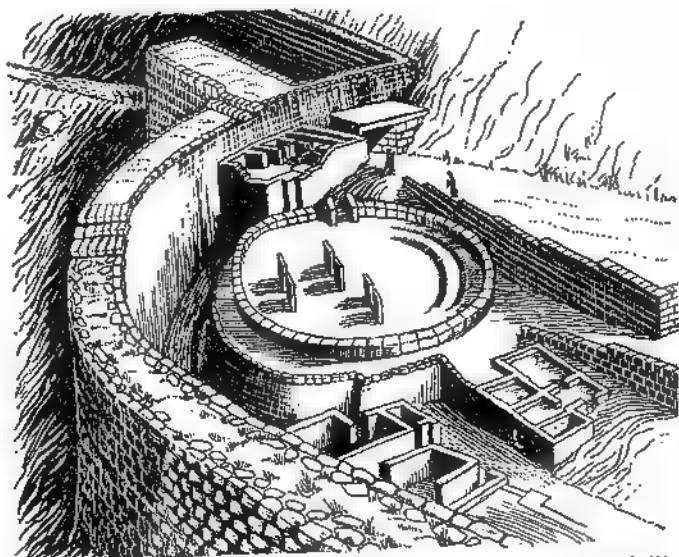
hidden its entrance. And now, in just such a place, Schliemann dug; within the citadel and where at the foot of a slope earth and débris had slowly slid down from the time it was built. Digging in the fierce heat of July his workmen first unearthed a stone circle. Then came grave-stones, carved to show pictures of warriors in chariots. Then a sort of circular stone altar: Schliemann said it had been used to allow the blood of sacrifice to pour down to the illustrious dead below, that is if there were any dead below. Then they reached solid rock.

But not *everywhere* solid rock. The spades found a place where the soft earth continued downwards. Amidst rising excitement the diggers began to uncover a wide shaft cut vertically down into the rock. Carefully they dug, sifting out each spadeful. Nothing of great interest until they were fifteen feet down the shaft. Then it was that Sophie Schliemann saw the glint of gold—a gold ring. As before the workmen were dismissed.

One gold ring: not much compared to the 12,271 of the "Treasure of Priam". But of course that was only a beginning. By the end of the excavation there had been unearthed such a treasure of ancient gold as had never been unearthed before. Only Tutankhamen's tomb would exceed the find in wealth—and not even that in significance.

There were the skeletons of nineteen people, two of them children. These two sad babes were actually wrapped in sheet gold—perhaps Schlie-





The shaft graves at Mycenae: what they may have looked like originally

mann thought of the fabled gold cradle for which as a child he had wanted his father to dig. Lain beside the skeletons of the men were found the most wonderful collection of bowls and drinking cups and daggers and swords. And over the faces of the men were gold masks. Schliemann lifted these reverently. As always happens at the impact of air, what was below at once slid away in dust. But one, at the north end of the tomb, for a while held its form. Schliemann gazed in awe. Then later that day he sent a telegram to the King of Greece:

*"I have gazed on the face of Agamemnon."*

As the stuff was cleaned and sorted and care-

fully examined two highly significant facts came to light.

The first was that certain of the finds tallied most marvellously with Homeric descriptions.

There was for instance a gold drinking-cup. It was a very distinctive cup, with as it were straps of metal connecting the handles with the base, and along the handles lay the replicas of doves. It was an easy task for Schliemann to remember Book XI of the *Iliad* where Nestor pours out wine from a special cup:

It had four handles. Each was supported by two legs; and on top of each, facing one another, were two doves feeding.

The only difference was four handles as against two.

The second likeness concerned a shield. Homer usually spoke of his warriors as bearing round shields. But now and then—and it was a puzzling inconsistency—he described one quite different. Ajax in fighting Hector held one such before him “like a tower”; and Hector leaving the battle to seek the prayers of the townsfolk and to see his wife—a human touch this—slings his shield on his back, and:

As he walked, the dark leather rim of his bossed shield tapped him above and below, on the ankles and on the back of the neck.

Now, on one of the unearthed daggers, beautifully inlaid in metal, there was depicted a lion

hunt. And one of the hunters has just such a shield. (See plate facing page 89.)

Thirdly, a helmet—Odysseus' this time. Before setting off with Diomedes on the famous raid Odysseus is lent a very special helmet. It is so special that Homer goes into a long explanation of where it came from and then describes it. Made of leather and felt, it was adorned by "a row of white and flashing boar's tusks". Schliemann knew that quotation too, of course. In the fourth grave he was delighted to find no less than 60 boars' tusks, all cut flat on one side and with two holes bored in them for fastening. Later he was to find ivory plaques and a little ivory head that actually showed these boar-tusk helmets.

The other significant fact about the finds in the shaft graves did nothing to bear out their discoverer's contention that they were "Homeric"; indeed, in the latter end it did rather the reverse. It was a double fact: some of the things of gold found in the graves were unexpected in what they depicted, and all of them were—beautiful. Here was a high and mature art: that dagger for instance depicting the lion hunt and the man-high shield, here was a workmanship in *intaglio*, a "painting in metals" of which any craftsman of any age, modern, Italian Renaissance, Byzantine, would be more than proud. Then the curious and unexpected nature of some of the things unearthed: a model of a bull's head with a replica of the sun on its forehead; another with between its horns a double

axe. There were also very many small seals, some made out of semi-precious stones, some made into signet rings, and the seals carved to show exciting scenes of action. In some ways the figures were "Homeric", the tall shields again appearing and something like the boar-tusk helmets. But in other ways they were certainly not: the men curiously wasp-waisted, the women with elegant hair-do's and with flounced dresses and bodices that left their breasts bare.



Impress (much enlarged) from ■ gold signet ring of Mycenae  
(note the shield).

These tiny seals were most unexpected and very intriguing. They intrigued a certain Englishman, thirty years younger than Henry Schliemann—who was to startle the world with his discoveries as greatly as the romantic German had done, and at the same time to lead the story into new and unexpected paths.

# 6

## OVER THE SEA TO CRETE

IT IS perhaps not very hard to guess from the clues given at the end of the last chapter who is the new character in the story and where it was that he started excavating. It is the Englishman Arthur Evans—later Sir Arthur Evans—and he dug at Knossos in Crete, where the fabled Minotaur was supposed once to have had his lair.

We cannot tell Arthur Evans' story as it deserves to be told, because we are only concerned with one aspect of it: how it helped in finding out about the Greeks of Troy. We cannot afford even to devote more than a single short chapter to him; for another name comes crowding in, that of the man who though he died so young did what Arthur Evans never managed to do, deciphering the Cretan writing—a writing that, most significantly as we shall see, turned up on the mainland of Greece as well as on the island of the Minotaur.

Sometimes it seems to pay to have disabilities, short sight for instance. Arthur Evans could examine small things more closely and see in

them more detail than most people—into those tiny seals cut in semi-precious stones, for instance. He was fascinated by these; and saw that many of them had what appeared to be some sort of primitive writing upon them.

He met Schliemann, and the seals, when holidaying in Greece with his young wife: the German aged 61, the Englishman 32, the year 1883. Evans was already quite well known, not as an archaeologist but as a war correspondent in the Balkans, championing the cause of the Serbs and the Croats and the Montenegrins and all the other nations of tough peasants who were trying to throw off the yoke of the Turk. Evans did not like the official Turk—which was something he had in common with Schliemann.

Another thing they had in common was that by the time of their middle age the two were both rich men; Evans, however, had inherited his riches, not accumulated them by his own efforts. That did not make him any the less energetic or hardworking—so long, that is to say, as he could find something to his taste on which to work.

That something was in particular exploring the past. And again there was a proviso: he was happy so long as he could do things in *his* way and nobody else's. This great desire for independence was one of the causes of Arthur Evans going to Crete. For after being a war correspondent (and a bit of a coin collector and antiquarian on the side) he took a more settled job

and became the Curator of Oxford's famous museum, the Ashmolean. He found it stuffed with plaster casts of classical Greek and Roman statuary—you can still see them there if you like—and filled with nothing else, or so it seemed to him, but stuffiness, mental as well as physical: the story of how he did his best to put that right is something else we have not time to tell. But one of the expected duties of a curator of the Ashmolean was to travel and prospect—and Arthur Evans saw to it that he did just that thing.

Not until 1899 was he able to start work in Crete. For in that year the Turkish rulers moved out. Evans moved in—immediately buying up the site of the ruins of Knossos as a more ordinary person buys a plot for his suburban villa. And there, to put it shortly and simply, he found an entirely unknown and unsuspected ancient civilization. He was as nearly surprised as anyone else to find so much.

But we are going too fast. Just why had Arthur Evans gone to Crete? Was it to dig up the site of the legend of Theseus and Ariadne and the horrible bull-headed Minotaur, as Henry Schliemann had gone to the site of Helen's Troy? Not a bit of it; *his* outlook was more scientific and less romantic. To start with, he went to Crete to try to prove something. Schliemann had shown him his Mycenaean discoveries, tiny seals included. What Arthur Evans wanted to know was: where did the

clever makers of these things come from? Though very little indeed was yet known of the Cretan past he had an idea that it was to that island that he must go. He became surer of this when he discovered seals similar to Schliemann's in an Athens antique shop and was told definitely that Crete was the shopkeeper's source of supply. The first job Arthur Evans set himself when he did finally get to Crete was to collect as many of these tiny seals as possible: many peasant women still had them, calling them "milk stones", regarding them as charms that helped them to feed and nurse their babies, but willing at a price to sell them.

But let us forget the connection with Mycenae for a while, and see what this one man—with help of course, very expert help—managed to bring to light for the edification of a surprised and delighted world.

This totally unknown and unsuspected civilization which he discovered was a *sophisticated* one—"grown-up" we might say, mature, even perhaps growing towards decadence: powerful but peaceful: well nourished and well mannered. A single example will serve to show what is meant. A wall fresco was discovered that revealed a row of ladies watching some spectacle or display. They are *fashionable* ladies, beautifully dressed, chatting. A French archaeologist saw them, and said with surprise: "But those are *Parisiennes!*"

Another thing that surprised and struck the





Fresco from Knossos : "Parisian" ladies in conversation

imagination of the world was the modern plumbing that the excavated palace displayed—it seems, we are told, to impress the present day visitor more than anything else. But that is of course only important as a sign of higher things. Good plumbing is one of the necessities, one might say one of the prerequisites, for "gracious living". But more importantly it was also an aspect, merely one aspect, of the surprising *architectural* skill which the colossal rambling building displayed. Here was cleverness and skill and tradition: flourishing and long-established art.

Arthur Evans year after year dug up more of the place, saving it from further ruin so that future generations might also see what he saw; making ever fresh discoveries; meeting fresh problems of interpretation. And in solving his problems he had one great help, which Schliemann never had. Crete over the centuries had imported things of use and art from Egypt, as we import Italian china or motor-car designs now or ■ the Continent in Julius Caesar's time

imported pearls and hunting dogs from Britain. And a lot of the things that Crete imported, unlike hunting dogs, remained intact for the modern excavators to find, pottery for instance.

Now how did that help? We come to one of the archaeologist's most useful accomplishments, *the* most useful perhaps, what is called "comparative dating". This is how it works. It is well known and obvious that the farther you dig down on a site—unless of course there has been somebody digging there before or there has been some other mix-up—the earlier in date will be the things you discover. Say you discover first some bits of pottery that nearly all have a pattern of fishes on them; then, lower down, bits with flowers on them; then, lower still, pottery with a recurring pattern of a pair of eyes, a sort of face. You will from your evidence know this: face is older than flowers, flowers is older than fish. But how old are any of them? There you are flummoxed; you don't know. But say that the same sorts of pottery, fish, flower and face, have all already been discovered in another excavated civilization of which very much more is known, including a pretty accurate dating of its history. Then you have indeed got somewhere.

That is what happened as between Egypt and Crete. By the early years of this century, when Arthur Evans was excavating, people had been discovering facts about ancient Egypt for the best part of a hundred years. Not only that, but

there was in Egypt the hieroglyphic writing which had been used extensively and which had been successfully deciphered. The dates of Egyptians' ancient history were therefore known almost exactly.\* And so therefore—since fashion in pottery in ancient times was always a very slow-changing and dependable thing to go by—the dating of ancient Crete was also known. Not so exactly as Egyptian of course, but pretty definitely all the same.

Arthur Evans found in fact the Egyptian dating so useful that he based his system of Cretan dating upon it, dividing his newly discovered civilization into three periods, as had been divided the Egyptian, and calling them "Early Minoan" (Minoan because the King at Knossos was always called "Minos"), "Middle Minoan" and "Late Minoan". It fitted very well. And this meant of course that Cretan civilization was comparable in age, was in fact surprisingly old. Here are the dates, approximate of course:

Early Minoan : 2600 – 2000 B.C.

Middle Minoan : 2000 – 1600 B.C.

Late Minoan : 1600 – 1125 B.C.

It was during the last of these periods that Crete really flourished and the great palaces of which Knossos was merely the greatest were

\* Not of course by our method, "B.C." and "A.D." But — you have found recorded some absolutely calculable date—such as a total eclipse of the sun—you can then relate one dating-system exactly to the other.

built. Somewhere between 1600 and 1400 B.C. was the time when the Minoan artists were creating their lovely vases and cups and bowls and were covering the palace walls of King Minos with frescoes of pretty ladies and other creatures more virile if less decorative.

It is what was on these walls and cups and vases that brings us back to our own proper subject, the Greeks of Troy and Mycenae and the connection with their contemporaries in Crete. The Cretan women were depicted wearing flounced dresses with tight bodices that left the breasts bare; the men wore a sort of kilt that was also very tight-waisted; and the sport or spectacle which those particular "Parisienne" ladies were watching was executed by both men and women and had a most intimate connection with *bulls*. Now bulls could make people who knew the ancient legends think of one thing only, the legend of *Theseus and Ariadne*. Here is the legend in brief. Theseus, son of an ancient and legendary king called Aegeus, voluntarily went with the contingent of seven youths and seven maidens who had to be sent each year as tribute to Minos, king of all-powerful Knossos. Minos kept in the fastnesses of his palace, at the centre of a labyrinth or maze, a terrible bull-headed monster, and it was to this monster that the youths and maidens had to be sacrificed. But Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, fell in love with Theseus, and gave him a thread

whereby he could trace his way out of the labyrinth. Theseus duly penetrated to the den of the monster, killed him, and so saved the youths and maidens. He took away Ariadne for good measure, though he did not marry her, which was unkind.



Fresco from Knossos: the famous bull-leaping

How to interpret that legend in terms of historic possibilities? Here at least is one way. There is a wonderful fresco discovered by Sir Arthur Evans which shows a man and a girl *bull-leaping*. It is reproduced here, so that a detailed description is superfluous. The man and girl in the picture are in fact using the horns of the bull as a sort of pair of "parallel bars" and somersaulting over his back: a feat that no modern athlete or bullfighter will even try though this does not mean that it is impossible. Theseus and his friends may therefore have been as it were forced-labour acrobats, young and strong men and girls who were sent to be trained in a sport that was so dangerous that sooner or

later it inevitably ended in death. And the labyrinth with the Minotaur at the end of it? The bull was worshipped in ancient Crete: there is ample evidence of that in other discoveries. He was a symbol of great strength. Perhaps the Minotaur then was King Minos himself, wearing a symbolic bull's mask and officiating in an underground chamber as a sort of priest-king at some rather terrible religious ceremony.

There is another aspect of bull worship that Arthur Evans himself discovered—and in a very personal way. Crete has always been subject to earthquakes. And when the earth quakes it was said to make a noise like a bull roaring underground. Evans experienced just such an earthquake—and heard just such a roaring. . . .

Now there are two significances here, with which to finish this chapter.

First, Knossos suffered terrible ruin in somewhere just about the year 1400 B.C. It might have been by earthquake; or it might have been at the hand of an invading army, the palace of Minos sacked as the palace of Priam was sacked. And if the latter, then sacked perhaps by people who wished no longer to pay a tribute of youths and maidens.

Secondly Theseus was son of the legendary king of Athens; in other words he was a *Greek*. He was in fact very much a Greek, and even more intimately connected with our story: the

legend runs that he was an earlier capturer of Helen before ever Agamemnon or Paris came upon the scene, being forced however to give her up when Helen's twin brothers came to fetch her and losing his own mother Aethre as slave-attendant to Helen in the process.

The connections between Crete and Greece were in fact obviously intimate. And it was more than mere legend that connected them.

## 7

## A MODERN DETECTIVE

LET US have a little recapitulation and a tidying up process. Homer wrote about the Greeks at Troy in much circumstantial detail, and nobody quite knew whether to believe him or not. Then along came Schliemann who did believe; and he showed, against disbelief and opposition but finally to most people's satisfaction, that at least there had been a real Troy. Then he found that there had been a very real Mycenae, the fortress town from which the leader of the Greek expedition had come, and not only so but that it showed ■ much less primitive civilization than had been expected. Next appeared Arthur Evans, who proved (a) that the Mycenaeans had taken some of their ideas and their art and their fashions from Crete and (b) that Crete had supported a civilization very much older and very much grander than had ever been imagined.

Where do we go from there? We are going through the rest of the archaeological story up to the present day. This, a sort of jet-propelled journey, is likely to do scant justice to the great army of experts and excavators who have



followed Schliemann and Evans. That cannot be helped: it is somehow always the pioneers who are the most interesting and the most significant; the others have to take their chance of fame and be content with the praise (as well as the rivalry) of their fellow experts.

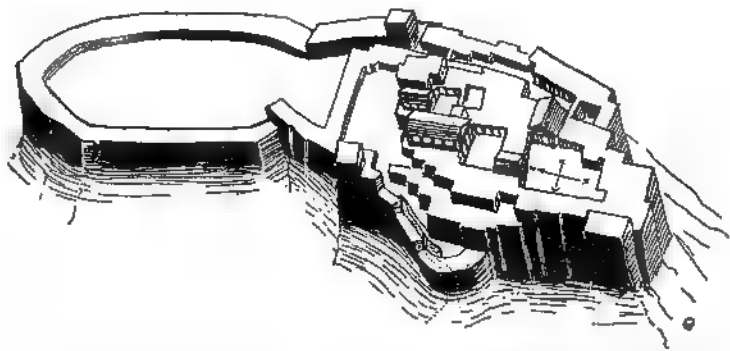
First of all it must be realized that neither the German ex-tycoon nor the English ex-journalist were infallible as archaeologists. Evans never managed to do what he had most wanted to do, to decipher the Minoan writing, in spite of the fact that one of his early finds was a mass of clay tablets with writing on them. (He got as far as making out the numerals.) The decipherment when it finally came was to prove some of Evans's assumptions to be wrong and generally to make things rather more puzzling and complicated. As for poor old Schliemann—and by the time he had finished at Mycenae he was growing old, though we must not be scornful of him just because we possess later knowledge—as for the enthusiastic and romantic German, he made some pretty bad mistakes. He had by this time enlisted the help of more knowledgeable and scientifically educated people—an architect called Dörpfeld in particular—and was humble enough to accept their advice and let them curb his impatience and bull-at-a-gate methods. But he died before he realized his biggest mistakes, which was perhaps merciful.

After Mycenae Schliemann went on to nearby Tiryns, a sort of subsidiary castle-fortress to

Mycenae and with some truly impressive walls. Then he went back to his beloved Troy. In the interval he visited England, where he really came into his own. The discoveries at Mycenae had lit the public imagination, as those in the Egyptian Tutankhamen's tomb were to do half a century later. The English learned men were kinder to him, taking their cue from Gladstone who was a classical scholar as well as a Prime Minister. "In London," wrote a very happy Schliemann, "I was received for seven weeks as if I had discovered a new part of the globe for England." Soon afterwards too came another event to make him happy, the birth of a son. He already had a daughter, Andromache; now the boy became Agamemnon: Trojan and Greek united at least in the Schliemann family. One of the baby's first experiences, by which he was considerably too young to be impressed, was to have a hundred lines of Homer declaimed over his head.

Back at Troy Schliemann was still struggling for the truth—and missing it by a hair's breadth. The surprising thing had been that the mound of Hissarlik revealed not *an* ancient Troy but several. There had been one Troy after another, each showing by its remains, its pottery and so on, a differing way of living. Schliemann counted seven Troys; and the final count was nine. He came to the conclusion that *the* Troy, the Troy of Homer and Helen, was the third from the bottom. But what a comparatively miserable

showing this Troy gave, how mingey and unheroic! At Mycenae there were those imposing "Cyclopean" walls; at Tiryns he had discovered



Tiryns: fortified and on a hilltop. Its noble ruins now overlook ■ modern gaol and the ever-beautiful bay of Nauplion. Mycenae is 15 miles or so inland and on a bigger hill

a great hall or *Megaron* such as Homer had described and Odysseus had owned, and now he found traces of just such a Megaron in Troy. But it was in a stratum too high up! Perhaps then the Homeric Troy was as high as the sixth layer, which would indeed give it imposing walls? But no, *no*! For it was in the third layer that Schliemann had discovered his much-prized "Treasure of Priam". Sticking stubbornly to his belief that that find really was contemporary with King Priam and Helen, Schliemann worked on—until in 1890, suffering from ■ bad inflammation of the ear but determined to get back to his wife and family for Christmas, he pushed himself too hard, and, worn out, collapsed in the street and died. His young

assistant Dörpfeld, continuing, was soon to make it clear that the third layer was much too early to be the Troy of the legend. And that meant that "Priam's Treasure" was not Priam's at all.\*

Yet what did that really matter so long as the mound of Hissarlik had been made to bring forth to the world evidence of the reality of Troy—which it had! Archaeological excavation now went ahead in very many places in the Greek world, and soon Schliemann's other great discovery was to receive its hard knocks too. Agamemnon's face was not Agamemnon's. Again, the relics at Mycenae were earlier than Schliemann had ever believed, this time by a lesser period, something like two or three hundred years.

And again, it really didn't matter very much. If the Mycenaean graves had been proved later

\* Dörpfeld recognized 7 layers and called No. 6 *the* Troy. Later American excavators, under Professor Carl Blegen, have put one more in front of this and divided No. 7 into two. Helen's Troy therefore becomes "Troy VIIA". Here are the Troys, with their probable and approximate dates and a short note or two about them:

Troy I	3200- 2600 B.C.	Stone Age.
Troy II	2600- 2300 B.C.	Early Bronze Age. This held "Priam's Treasures."
Troy III-V	2300- 1900 B.C.	Miserable affairs.
Troy VI	1900- 1300 B.C.	Shows connections with Mycenae. Ends in earthquake.
Troy VIIA	1300- 1200 B.C.	The Homeric Troy. Cyclopean walls. Signs of ending in fire and sudden
Troy VIIB	1200- 900 B.C.	Re-occupied by local tribes.
Troy VIII	900- 350 B.C.	A Greek town, living on its past.
Troy IX	350 B.C.-A.D. 400	Revived by Alexander's generals, and hanging on as a Graeco-Roman city.

rather than earlier in time, that might have discredited Schliemann. But here, if not Agamemnon himself, were surely Agamemnon's ancestors; and it still remained true that here had lived the sort of people Homer had been describing, and more grand and important than anyone had previously imagined.

There was also, as we know, the Mycenaean connection with Crete. Was Arthur Evans also to be convicted of error after his death? Hardly, though there are those who are trying to do so. Or rather, shall we say, he was not shown wrong in any fundamentals: no archaeologist can expect all his findings to stand uncorrected. The old autocrat as time went on did offend some people by his methods. Sir Arthur—he was knighted in 1911—was very keen to preserve what he disinterred for others to see and for this purpose did much restoration and shoring up of crumbling walls with modern ferro-concrete. Vandalism! said the purists. But as he spent only his own money, and as the alternative was obviously for the whole site to decay into ruin, they have not very much reason on their side. The grand old man was not very perturbed, and continued to visit Crete in each spring and to supervise the excavations up to his eightieth year. His last years—and he lived to be ninety—he spent in the tremendous job of sorting out his material and in producing his magnificent four-volume book, *The Palace of Minos*.

But he never deciphered the Minoan writing.

That, when it was finally done, gave the greatest correction to his findings, and the greatest surprise.

Is it so very difficult to decipher an ancient writing? Surely if you try *long enough*? . . . So anyone might think. The answer is that if you have nothing to go on, no knowledge of what language is being used and no discoverable similarities with anything that has gone before or after, then a writing may be undecipherable totally and for ever. It began to look as if the Minoan script was one of those.

There is a surprising and rather cheering continuity in these things. Evans was impelled to excavate in Crete by meeting Schliemann and seeing his seals. A schoolboy heard a lecture by Sir Arthur Evans; and thereupon determined one day to decipher, if he could, what the great man himself had failed to decipher.

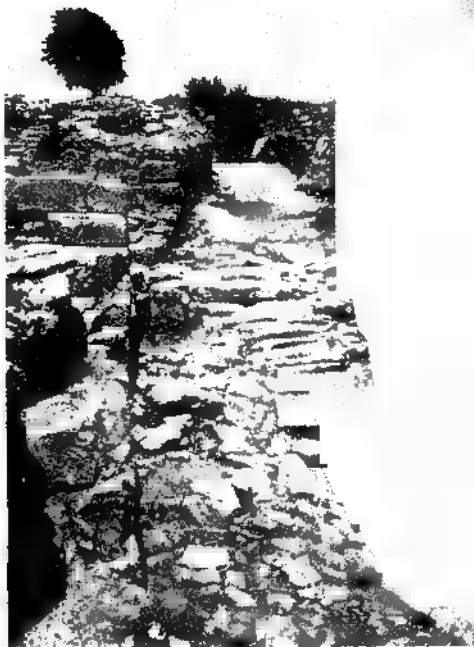
That schoolboy was Michael Ventris. He was 14 years old—and, the year being 1936, he was born just a hundred years after Henry Schliemann. Unlike either of his two great predecessors, he was to start his archaeological career early and to die young, tragically at the age of 34 in a motor accident. But he had done his deciphering job by then.

You don't determine to tackle a job that has baffled a famous man and then succeed at it and at the same time be a very ordinary person. Michael Ventris was not. His father was an

Army Officer in India, his mother half Polish. He went to school in Switzerland, where undeterred by—or enthused by—being taught in French and German, he amused himself by learning the local Swiss-German dialect. In his holidays, when not abroad, he amused himself—at the British Museum. He had learnt Polish by the age of six: he was fascinated by languages as another great decipherer, Jean Champollion of Egyptian fame, had been fascinated. He finished his education in England, at Stowe school, where, ■ he modestly put it, he “did a bit of Greek”. Then he started to train to be an architect. He was just old enough to fight in the Second World War and became a navigator in a bomber squadron—one day he horrified his pilot by navigating solely by maps made by himself. After the war he returned to his training, became ■ successful architect, married, and had two children. The Minoan script was not forgotten; all his spare time he worked on it, and by 1952 he had broken the back of the job.

There is no room in this book to tell how a primitive writing is likely to have developed, nor much of how one sets about turning the key that will unlock the secret—for anyone who is interested there is something of this in one of the other books in this series called *Finding Out About Ancient Egypt*. But we can, without becoming too involved, have a look at what Michael Ventris and his unsuccessful predecessors were trying to do. To decipher an ancient

Helen's Troy. (*Right*) A street and (*below*) storage jars and debris from an earthquake.





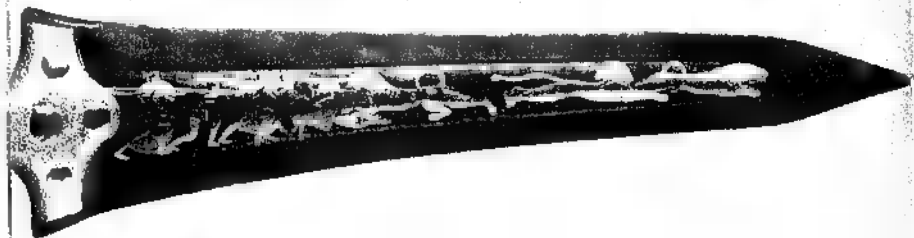


(Above) Troy: remains of tower and fortifications. (Below) The palace of Homer's ancient Nestor at Pylos, where "Minoan" script was found.





Schliemann's finds from the shaft graves, including golden mask.



Found at Mycenae and mentioned in Homer. "Dove cup" (*below*) and dagger showing the tall shields (*above*).



script is a little like deciphering ■ spy's code in wartime—with the added difficulties that you don't know the spy's language, that he seems to have a primitive and unpredictable mentality, and that he may not be writing for anyone else's benefit at all but only in a kind of personal shorthand for himself. As a beginning: are those strange and ancient signs pictures of *things* or pictures of *sounds*—or neither? Then it is so easy to jump to conclusions. For instance it seemed obvious that the Minoan signs had some similarity with signs used in Cyprus. And then, had not ancient Crete been influenced by early Egypt and its hieroglyphs? A Professor Hrozný, whose success with Hittite writing had perhaps made him incautious, produced this translation of a tablet:

Place of administration Sahu(i)ta (is) a bad  
(?) field (?): this (delivers in) tribute 22  
(?) measures, 6 T-measures of saffron capsules.

Ventris, and the Cambridge classical scholar who helped him, John Chadwick, now give the translation however as:

Thus the priestess and the key-bearers and the Followers and Westreus (hold) leases: so much wheat 21.6 units.\*

\* Westreus is a proper name. "The Followers" will be explained later. This example, together with the rest of the information about Michael Ventris and the Minoan Script, is taken from John Chadwick's book, *The Decipherment of Linear B*.

Another enthusiast, who shall be nameless, deciding that the language used might be allied to Basque, produced this:

. . . the lord walking on wings the breathless path, the star-smiter, the foaming gulf of waters, dogfish smiter on the creeping flower; the lord, smiter of the horse-hide (*or* the surface of the rock), the dog climbing the path, the dog emptying with the foot the water-pitchers, climbing the circling path, parching the wine-skin. . . .

As Sir Winston Churchill might have said, some dogfish, some dog!

But enough of this silliness. It is easy to make fun of those who made mistakes—it was easy enough to make mistakes. What was needed, besides a knowledge of the behaviour of ancient languages, was a tremendous capacity for hard slogging work and an even more tremendous self-discipline: it was no good pretending things were as you liked them to be, no good following favourable clues if to do so sinned against the known laws of grammar and language or against historical facts already known. There *were* picture-signs of what have been water-pitchers, and of horses if not horse-hides. But there was no good reason why the language should be Basque.

Ventris and those who tried before him had actually three separate kinds of Cretan writing on which they could have worked. The first

was a very primitive affair of purely pictorial signs. This was the "writing" of Arthur Evans' seal stones. Next there had obviously grown out of this an affair much more like proper writing, where the pictures had become mere outlines, where other signs were added, and where the whole thing went along pretty smoothly from left to right. This Evans had called "Linear A". Thirdly there was a later and modified form of Linear A, called "Linear B". Fortunately there was the most of this available, and it looked the least primitive and the least difficult. Everyone concentrated on it. It seemed obviously to contain some pictures of *things*, pictograms, but also pictures of *sounds*. There were too many of these however it was realized—and here was the sensible, prosaic way of tackling the job, though not so exciting as inventing dogfish smiters—for them to represent a proper alphabet; they probably represented syllables—vowels alone or a consonant and a vowel, "wa-na-ka", "o-ka", "ti-ri-po-da".



"Linear B" from Pylos. The seventh sign is an ideogram (a man); the eighth and last signs are numerals; the rest are signs for sounds or syllables

Not that anyone had reached as far as that yet. Ventris just stared and studied and thought. He had a remarkable visual memory, a sense of pattern—after all, he had become an architect,

and you remember those maps. It was really patterns he was after, clues from patterns. Did words show similarities of endings, and how many different endings could a word have? Answers to such questions could give a clue to the grammar of the language—changes such as in our verb: *make, makes, making*. What was a short combination that recurred and so could be the word *and*? Could he spot place-names, such ■ Knossos? What were the most frequently used signs? And would these be likely to represent the vowels, as in the Greek language, or not?

That was where Ventris' self discipline pulled him up short. Some "Linear B" tablets had in fact been discovered on the Greek mainland as well ■ at Crete—the greatest find at Pylos, home of Homer's garrulous old "elder statesman" Nestor. But, it was thought, this rather surprising fact could mean nothing more than that the barbaric early Greeks had been copying the Cretans, or perhaps employing Cretans, as with the artistic cups and bowls at Mycenae: everyone knew that the ancient Cretan civilization could not *possibly* have talked Greek.

Ventris himself favoured something like Etruscan as the language of ancient Crete. And nobody knew any Etruscan.

And *yet*: how nice it would be if the language of the Linear B tablets was Greek! Greek was a language very well known, including its ancient

forms and dialects: you could experiment with Greek. And—something much more important—if you were to fit Greek words into the pictorial signs, if you were to fit Greek into the patterns and probable grammatical changes you had discovered, then the whole thing clicked. The key turned.

This worried Michael Ventris a great deal. It was absurd! He was in something of the same position as his predecessor Champollion had been over the Egyptian hieroglyphs, stuck because of a wrong preconception which he felt *must* be the truth. But Ventris did not let it hold him up for so long as had the nineteenth-century Frenchman. Just ■ he had the strength of mind not to jump to conclusions, so now he had the strength of mind to follow through with what he felt was rather absurd and what he knew all the other experts would consider very absurd. He assumed that the script was in fact an ancient version of Greek—and he forged ahead. One clue helped out another, the sound of one sign gained would help with the next. You remember perhaps that Agamemnon's proposed gift to the angry Achilles included some iron tripods, very precious things apparently. Now our word "tripod" is itself a Greek word: *tri* means "three" and *pod* is the stem of the word that means "foot". There were pictures of tripods on the tablets. And now Ventris, with his new-found knowledge (and his risky assumption) could read against this picture: *ti-ri-po-da*.



That successful bit of reading perhaps clinched the argument for Ventris more than anything else. He had pierced the secret of the Minoan Script. He could read it. *And it was Greek.* People could say what they liked!

They did say, of course. But one by one they were convinced that the young architect, the admittedly hard working and serious minded amateur, was right. Michael Ventris had succeeded.

But the new fact did put the cat amongst the pigeons.

## 8

### HUNTING, SHOOTING AND FIGHTING

HAVING COVERED the story of the discoverers we may now turn to the discoveries. Just what had been brought to light, just what had been learnt?

By and large, archaeology brings two things to light: a people's history, and a people's way of living. Leaving history for the moment—including the trouble that Michael Ventris had caused by his disconcerting discovery that people in Crete were writing Greek—we will have a look at the more intimate side. That, one would think, should be an easier task, and more particularly so because we have the written record to help us: we have Homer; and Schliemann has taught us that Homer was not talking about purely fairy-tale people.

Unfortunately it is not so simple as this. For what Homer tells does not always tally with what has been dug up. Sometimes of course it has done so brilliantly and in detail, much to the delight of Schliemann and his companions. But there was another side to the picture. For instance Homer describes how the hero at his

death is always burned on ■ funeral pyre; archaeology however shows the practice of those times to have been burial in the ground and not cremation. Then there was the Homeric contradiction that we have already noticed, an occasional description of a great tall body-shield but the usual reference to a small round one.

The truth is that Homer was telling his story after the event, something between three and four hundred years after. That is a fact gradually established at the end of much argument that went on before and during and after Schliemann's excavations. This does not however lead



A lyre as perhaps used by the Homeric bards, made from a tortoiseshell

to inaccuracy as serious as one might imagine, largely because the poet was piecing together, improving, and making into one fine whole—or rather two fine wholes, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—what had been passed down without intermission by the intervening ages' equivalents of the history book and the story book and the archive. These were the *bards*, who went about the country reciting their lays. Homer in fact was quite genuinely telling history as it had come down to him, but sometimes when it seemed inadequate filling in picturesque detail from the life of his own times. And though times changed three thousand years ago much more slowly than they do now, yet change they did—in fact and at times startlingly, as we shall see when we come to our chapter of history. What one has to do is to take Homer not so much with a pinch of salt as while wearing a pair of glasses. And those glasses, surprisingly enough, will not minimize but, rather, magnify. The times that Homer wrote of were grander and wider and more prosperous than those in which he lived. That is something that Schliemann's discoveries at Mycenae and, more particularly, Ventris' reading of the tablets have made clear.

Three points before we get down to seeing as best we may what life was really like for the Greeks and Trojans of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*.

The first is that the way of life we are seeking to understand is one that did not last long. Homer as it were took a snapshot just in time.

The other two points concern the script that Ventris deciphered. The tablets discovered do in fact date at just about the time of the Troy episode, particularly those found in Greece itself; and because they are written in Greek it is the latter that are historically the more revealing. For this reason in fact they are now called not Minoan tablets, but Mycenaean tablets. Mycenae, home of Agamemnon as you remember and seat of power of these early Greeks, becomes the focal point. We talk of the *Mycenaean Age*.

The third point is a little saddening. These Mycenaean tablets do not tell us as much as we should like to know. Indeed that is putting it mildly. There is no history as such revealed by them as there was by the Egypt hieroglyphs or the cuneiform tablets of the Babylonians or the Hittites. There are no letters from one grand person to another; there is no poetry nor even anything approaching the flights of fancy that invented the "star-smiths" and the "foaming gulfs of water". The tablets are mostly what we should call Palace Accounts, rent-rolls, muster-rolls of workers on the estate, inventories of the contents of the store room, such as a careful mistress of a great country house might have kept in English medieval days. Not altogether so—there is a hint of exciting historical events as we shall see—but largely. Nevertheless even this sort of thing can reveal a great deal more than you would imagine.

Homer's *Iliad* is all about war, and so is a

good deal of the *Odyssey*. But you can't always be at war, at least it is best not to be; and these Greeks had to live and earn their living like everyone else in any age. We will leave war until the last, therefore, and begin with more everyday things. What were these warriors like *at home*? And what their wives and daughters and sons?

They were leading what we should call a *country* life. That may be obvious: towns, as we know them, did not exist. One might almost say they were leading a *country house* life, though the likeness should not be drawn too closely. It must be remembered that this is still the Bronze Age, when anything made of iron is rare and precious—those tripods with which Achilles was bribed!—and of course steel, plastics, paper and a host of “manufactured” things did not exist. However it is not so difficult to imagine a country house without those things, and, in the country at any rate, their lack really does not alter a way of life so very much. There is still seed-time and harvest; and, “Hermione dear, it's your turn to go out and feed the animals!”

But perhaps that last is somewhat of a false note, at least as far as the people who owned the house are concerned. For this was, most certainly, an *aristocratic* age, an age where, for good or ill, only the best people really counted and where the best people did not demean themselves by such work as tending the cattle. Though that is much less true of the women of the household than of the aristocratic men.

Incidentally, do not let the fact that this was a rigid *caste* society, and a slave society, so prejudice you against it that you cannot read about it with sympathy. It all occurred a very long time ago, and it will certainly never be recreated, and there is nothing we can do about it! Some things that they did in those days were admirable, some pleasant, some in our eyes silly, some pretty damnable, slavery included. If you were ■ *thes* (pronounced *thèz*, and of which a little more later) you would have probably wished yourself dead; if you were the son or daughter of the knight or baron who owned the big estate you would not have wished to exchange your fate with anyone. We must leave it at that.

This estate, this country house then. It was called the *Megaron*, "The Great Hall" or "The Big House"—that strikes a familiar note; you remember perhaps Anthony Trollope's Big (and Little) House at Allington, The *Megaron* would be made of timber and its main feature would be one enormous pillared hall—pillars of wood of course, the natural pillar is a tree trunk—in the centre of which stood the open hearth with the smoke going up, with luck, out of a hole in the roof. Rushes were on the floor or straw, and tables; and you had your feasts there, the Lord at the high table and the rest in order, the guests in places of honour, the "carver of the meat", an expert and important person, exercising his office at a separate table, a bard perhaps reciting heroic tales to the accompani-

ment of his lyre. The scene here is very like that of another and later "heroic" age, that of the Saxons and the Vikings. But what is surprising is that almost certainly it would have been the earlier scene and not the later that showed the greater evidence of civilization.

In the *Odyssey* we read of the search by Telemachus for his father Odysseus, still unreturned from the Trojan war. Accompanied by Nestor's son he comes to the Megaron of none other than Menelaus. And the two are quite overawed by the splendours of the place.

When they had feasted their eyes on the sight, they went and bathed in polished baths, and after the maidservants had washed them, rubbed them with oil and dressed them in warm mantles and tunics, they took their places on high chairs at the side of Menelaus son of Atreus. A maid came with water in a beautiful golden ewer and poured it out over a silver basin so that they could rinse their hands.

If no forks, at least the equivalent of finger bowls. Of course we must admit that Homer usually put the best face on things. And the Megaron could witness some pretty primitive happenings: later in the same story Homer is describing how in his own Great Hall the returned Odysseus begins the slaughter of the local lordlings who have been so treacherous to him. Traces of these great halls, tallying well with the descriptions—their imposing porches,



their women's quarters, their outhouses and stables—have been dug up in many places, Mycenae, ancient Athens, even Troy itself.

But the really important point about these "country houses" is *immaterial*, spiritual, rather than material: not the timbered porch and pillars, not even, as with some of the grand ones, their protecting fortress walls of stone, but their effect upon the people who lived there. They were to these people livelihood, home, and home-town all rolled into one. The Greek word for the whole thing was the *oikos*, "the household"—it is the word from which we get Economics, which meant originally the running of a household. And the *oikos* meant everything to the community who belonged to it. "Belonged" is the word; it gave them a sense of belonging. So much so that the slaves in this household must have been, and really to have felt themselves to be, pretty well off, while the real unfortunate was the *thes*, who was the utterly propertyless outsider, the man who unhappily owed allegiance to, and so earned protection from, no overlord, who got a job if he was lucky and payment for it if he was luckier.

In practice the slaves within the household were almost all women, for the simple reason that you got your slaves by war and raiding and when you warred and raided you usually killed off the men. The rest of the household, besides the large family of at least three generations, comprised odd "experts", of which more in a

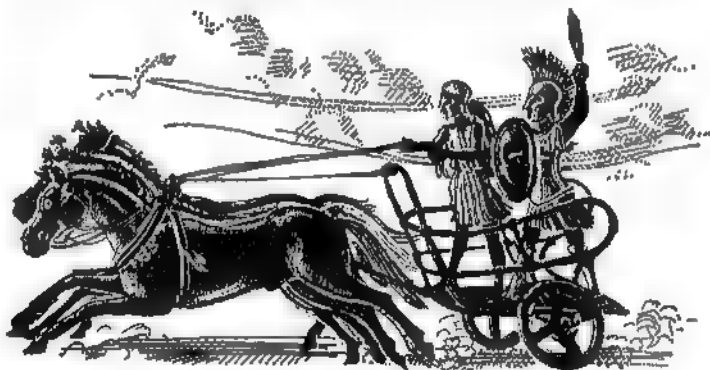
moment, and retainers. The retainers would be of all grades, from the farm hands and scullions to the Lord Chamberlain sort of person such as "my lord Etonius" whom Menelaus ordered to go out and welcome Telemachus, or the companion to the son of the house such as the orphaned Patroclus who was made companion or page-boy to the young Achilles.

The farming was stock and dairy farming rather than agriculture. Wheat and barley and olives were grown, but animals were the great stand-by, producing food by their meat and milk, and clothing and much else from their wool and hides, and comfort and help by their willingness to work. One Mycenaean tablet gives the names of yokes of oxen for ploughing: Dapple and Darkie, Winey and Whitefoot, Blondie and Bawler—that at least is John Chadwick's "rough" translation, and it sounds like the beginning of an English country song. Sheep however do not get names—neither do they nowadays for that matter—and what strikes us as revealing from the tablets is the colossal *numbers* of sheep listed. If "Hermione" or any other daughter of the house did not often have to do anything so menial as tend the beasts, her way of life was very much bound up with them, with these sheep at any rate. For, as in most subsequent ages, the ladylike occupation was to spin the wool and weave it, and then perhaps to embroider the result—we have already met Odysseus's Penelope, who weaved in the day

and undid most of her work at night in order to put off and fool her importunate suitors; and when Telemachus in search of his father had been feasted by good king Menelaus it was Helen herself who came down from her bower to entertain him, trailing behind her her maid-servants and her needlework. The girls in those households cannot have had a very exciting time.

The boys, one would think, lived a much more thrilling life. As a start they can have had very little in the way of lessons, though neither can the girls for that matter. Good manners they had to learn no doubt, a code of honour, very likely the reciting of the deeds of their ancestors and the details of their family tree. But reading and writing? You left that to the trained scribes, as you left the furniture making to your carpenter, armour making to your bronze-smith and the cleaning of your clothes to the fuller. If the sheep governed, indirectly, the life of the girl, the horse must have governed the life of the boy. Nearly a thousand years later the Persian nobility would be proud to say that all they expected of their sons was to shoot straight, to ride well, and tell the truth; perhaps very much the same applies to the young heroic Greek. Horses were something rather new in the world then, new that is to say as something more than one of the herded animals that gave you meat and milk; you do not have to go very much farther down below "Troy VIIA" before traces of horse and harness disappear. The Trojans Homer

calls "tamers of horses", and the plains of Argos, which Agamemnon's megaron overlooked, were described lovingly as "where the horses grazed". The horse as a steed then, particularly ■ the drawer of a chariot, was something rather new and surely very thrilling: the country house in fact was a "horsey" country house, and woe betide the boy who didn't like and couldn't control horses, who could not soon learn to drive and shoot from his father's chariot in the hunt as he would later in war.



The chariot of the Trojans

For the rest the boy's education must have been in what we would call *athletics*: running and jumping and wrestling, and lifting and throwing weights in the shape of great lumps of iron, and shooting with the bow and arrow. Odysseus, showing himself in disguise to those lordlings whom he was later to slay, was insulted by one of them with the suggestion that perhaps he was a trader and so no good at "games".

Odysseus soon showed what he could do with a bow too strong for anyone else to use: he was in fact very much "a man of games", and soon he was playing at anything but games with the weapon in question. Like a kitten, the boy in his play was preparing for more serious things.

Now we may turn to those "experts" of whom we spoke. The tablets list some of them, potters and carpenters and so forth. There are also "unguent boilers", or as we might say scent and face-cream makers. Much of their product seems curiously enough to have gone as offering to the gods, but no doubt the women saw that they got their share, Helen included. The most important experts, however, seem undoubtedly to have been the metal workers. Homer backs up that impression. He loves to spread himself on the making of armour, the wonderful artistic work on a shield; even the gods have their metal worker, Hephaestus, though since the Olympians can hardly labour like mortals he has to be rather an unusual god, with a lameness and a touch of buffoonery about him.

The thing about these metal workers and perhaps some other of the experts, is that they hardly seem to belong to the *oikos*, the nice cosy, self-contained household, and for a reason the very opposite to that for the exclusion of the *thes*, because they were too grand. This Homeric society was perhaps new and primitive enough

to be rather surprised at any idea of "division of labour" as the modern economist calls it, at the conception of anyone so unusual as not to work on the land and automatically get his share of the produce. These experts had to be kept by the rest. The people did this with a good grace however, calling them—the evidence is back with Homer now—the *demioergi* or "those who work for the people" and probably paying them pretty royally, perhaps as the early English did their clergymen by giving them a house and tithe or percentage of all their incomes. Yet there are signs that these metal workers, these aristocrats of the specialists, were not, even so, contented and often moved on from one great household to another. They were travellers; they were indeed "tinkers", a phenomenon that appears all over the Bronze Age world, in our own country (the "Beaker People") included. But what grand tinkers they were, and how their trade and name has by now come down in the world!

And if good metal workers were scarce and could command their price, then metal itself was even scarcer. We have spoken of the household as being well-nigh self-sufficing; but here was one important aspect in which it was most certainly not. The Bronze Age was continually searching for metal, trading in metal, grabbing metal. Men were always even swapping metal. Not only were dead warriors always stripped of their armour—rather as one might take off the useful parts from a derelict motor

car—but live warriors were often unaccountably exchanging armour. Menelaus and Hector did it in their famous combat that was stopped because of failing light; Diomedes did it with a Trojan whom he suddenly discovered was a distant relation of his, getting incidentally well the better of the bargain. Copper you coveted; tin even more so, because it was scarcer but when mixed with copper made the harder bronze. Gold, the lovely bright untarnishing gold, you would do almost anything to get. As for iron, the new metal that no one had yet quite found out how to handle easily, you hoarded it in great heaps and besides putting-the-weight with it used it gradually as the occasion arose—and then when it made something as useful as ■ three-footed cauldron you kept the precious product as a treasure and an item of prestige and didn't use it: you were definitely "up on the Joneses" if you had more iron cauldrons than he had.

But we must not laugh at these foolishly heroic early Greeks. That word "treasure" explains a great deal, though the explanation is curious. Every great *oikos* had its Store Room; materially that was the hub and centre of the household, and one of the major uses for writing was to keep an inventory of its contents. There were the store of grain, the great and graceful jars, *amphorae*, filled with oil or wine, the spare farm tools, the harness and accoutrements. But there too was "the treasure", the treasure

particularly of metal, from the bowls and cups of gold such as were unearthed at Mycenae and that were great works of art, through shields and armour to the lumps of iron and the would-be useful tripod-cauldrons.

Your treasure was at once your bank balance and your outward and ostentatious sign of wealth. The question at once arises, however, how did you get hold of it; in particular—and remember that trade was barred to you as beneath your dignity—how did you acquire more of it than the other fellow? One way of course was to acquire a good “tinker” and to get him to stay with you. Another was to fight and win booty, and another was to force a levy from the people, foreigners and suchlike, who did do the trading: those two ways go together and we will have more to say about them shortly. Finally you could swop gifts. We are back at the armour-exchanging habit again. But it extended much beyond armour. The Homeric Greek baron never entertained without sending his guest away with expensive presents. Odysseus’ son did not end his visit to Menelaus without the customary offer of gifts—and he sensibly said he would rather not have horses, because you couldn’t feed them easily where he came from, but he wouldn’t mind something out of “the Treasure”. The whole point about this business was that you always got your gift back in return, sooner or later. That was the accepted idea—it is an idea of many primitive



tribes nowadays, what in pidgin English is called "dashing"—and everyone honourably kept to the convention. In plain fact it was a kind of trade, but with nothing on the face of it sordid or commercial about the transaction, though one cannot help feeling that the astute man, and also perhaps the man already rich and powerful, did the better out of the bargains.

We are acquiring perhaps as we go along a little idea of how these people *thought*, of what was their outlook on life, their code of behaviour. That is what is really interesting. And it must be apparent that in many ways their outlook was not much like our own. The business of war and raiding will illustrate this even better.

Perhaps we need not say very much about the methods and accoutrements of this age's warring: you have only to read Homer to get your bellyfull of it, and there is no reason to think that he was not mostly accurate. We must notice however two ways in which Homer was wrong. Personal combat of the knights, the aristocrats, must have been what mattered; but Homer is so interested in this to the exclusion of all else that he gives the impression of the battle as an absolute chaos with practically nothing else happening but a number of personal duels that have no relation to each other whatever. No doubt the common soldiers, if there were any, would have been most adversely affected in their morale as they saw this or that of their

knights biting the dust; but there must have been some general fighting, some slight effort at control and generalship. Secondly Homer is a little wrong about the chariot. The method was hardly to use it as a sort of taxicab to the front line, when you proceeded to get out and fight on foot. You fought in your chariot, with your driver manœuvring the two horses skilfully while you seized the opportunities offered to hack and slash. Perhaps if your blood was really up you got out—or rushed out along the shaft between the horses in the ancient Briton's skilful way that so impressed Julius Cæsar. Perhaps if your blood was not up you stayed inside and used your horses' speed to retire smartly to the rear—it was, as has been observed before, a hot and momentary heroism in those days rather than a cold and steady one. What is true however is that the chariot was the great fighting vehicle, the *new* great fighting vehicle. The tablets depict chariots and list them most carefully. The wheels are stored and counted separately—which is something that Homer knew about:

Swiftly Hebe put on the chariot the curved wheels with eight spokes about the iron axle.



"Linear B" tablet from Knossos, showing ideogram for horse-chariot

Even goddesses had to assemble their machines before setting out—though, as Homer explains, this outfit is so grand that the tyres are of bronze, the hubs of silver, and the felloes of “unperishable gold”. We can bring in here, too, those “Followers” which the tablets talk of and which we promised to explain. They were followers of the King, perhaps his body-guard or (to use a Saxon word) his thegns, perhaps his special messengers or liaison officers. They had chariots and made good use of them. And these chariots, we must remember, were lightweight affairs, no more than a platform and framework on wheels; so that we can easily imagine the noble “follower” dashing back with his message and magnificently reining in his two foaming chargers to give it to the King.

Turn now to the way in which the business of warring serves so well to show the outlook of these early Greeks.

It does so because war is so important to them. We have said that they led a country house existence. That however is only half the picture. The other half is *war*. That was what the young man was trained for, war and the glory and heroics of war. You remember Hector’s prayer for his infant son: “May people say, when he comes back from battle, ‘Here is a better man than his father.’” He continues: “Let him bring home the bloodstained armour of the enemy he has killed, and make his mother happy.”

And then Odysseus, describing how he set out on his journeys after Troy had been sacked:

From Ilios the wind bore me near to the Cicones, to Ismarus. There I sacked the city and killed the men; taking the women and many goods, we divided them, so that no one might be cheated of his share through me.

Or Achilles boasting that he had destroyed twelve Trojan cities from shipboard and eleven on foot, from all of which he "took out much good treasure".

Raids and war, as we suggested, are much the same thing, and you don't expect to be squeamish about either of them. These people in fact set store by the more obviously manly virtues but not by the gentler ones: honourableness, bravery (not always lived up to perhaps) loyalty, magnanimity and generosity of spirit (even Achilles relented from his savagery in the end); but not often gentleness or pity, or even self-restraint.

The likeness to the Saxons and Vikings is very great. Professor George Trevelyan makes the comparison in a reverse direction in his *History of England*, and calls the times he is there describing "disorderly, fierce, noble and tragic". The same could be said of the times of the siege of Troy. These tough early Greeks, and the Trojans too, found life hard and short; and did nothing very much to make it less so.

# 9

## HISTORY

THIS CHAPTER will be devoted to history, to that and the result of archaeological discovery or digging up the past: not what people were like but what happened to them. This will be something of a more cold-blooded, scientific way of looking at the evidence: not the anger of Achilles or the joy of driving a chariot behind two fettleless horses, but "Bronze Age" and "Aryan immigrations" and the like. We still try to remember however that we are talking about fellow human beings who once really trod the ground that we can tread. We need not often make reference to the archaeological or philological\* discoveries behind our knowledge: we have tried to cover what gave us most directly our knowledge of the early Greeks, and if we draw from wider fields now we certainly have not time to describe them.

Let us set the framework before describing

\* Long words but useful ones. *Archaeology* is of course the science of ancient things in general; *philology* is the science of language, including the discovery and analysis of ancient languages. Actually *philology* means by derivation "the love of words", i.e. the activity of those who love words and study them, the implication being, I suppose, that you would not study them if you did not love them.

the picture. Go back to the beginning. Ingenious and helpful-minded people have divided early human history into Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age, and for the sufficiently good reason that the material that men used for tools and weapons—stone, bronze, iron—governed very materially their way of life; it was as good a division as any and very useful. Stone Age: that covers an immense period, from the time that beetle-browed half-men\* wandered about Africa, which is the most probable cradle of the human race, grasping optimistically but determinedly a slightly chipped lump of flint in their hands, to the time when some men or other, probably those around Asia Minor and the Mediterranean where they were showing themselves to be rather brighter-minded, discovered that there were metals lying about which, having the remarkable property of being malleable and yet sharp, made better tools. The real thing about the Stone Age is that you have to divide it into two very different parts, the Old Stone Age and the New. The Old Stone Age you can best look on as “the times in which man hunted”, hunted and did nothing else and made on the whole a very good thing out of it because there were such a multitude of animals to hunt. The period had its significance for future history if only for the fact that in it man got so used to animals: if you had been the young Achilles

\* Or ape-men; but as no ancestor of ours have been very like the ape as we know him, the title is misleading and insulting.

wandering about with his boy friend Patroclus and being taught to ride and drive you would have had an intimate fellow feeling for your horses such as can hardly be understood today, and largely because for generation upon generation your ancestors had lived with and hunted them. In the process of hunting, partly because the seas were then lower and there were more land bridges about between continent and continent, man spread himself over the face of the earth. He even reached, though rather late in the Old Stone Age, for the first time to America; he certainly arrived at such happy hunting grounds as the prairies and steppe-lands of Northern and Eastern Europe. But by comparison with even Greek and Trojan times, let alone our own times, there were not many human beings about the place: still for man a frighteningly empty world.

Then came that great step forward which changed the Old Stone Age into the New. It changed a very great deal more than the sort of stone tools that men were using; in fact you might say it brought in the modern world, a world we can picture and really understand. Men ceased to be only hunters, mere preyers upon Nature as one might say, and became—partners with Nature. They managed this remarkable step forward by thinking of two new inventions, having two bright ideas. Instead of eating any odd grain when they happened to see it they learnt to grow and cultivate corn;

instead of killing off the grazing or browsing beasts they learnt to tame and herd them and breed them. They became farmers and shepherds and cowboys.

Of course it was a gradual process, and a process that happened at different times in different parts of the world. And here again it was almost certainly around Asia Minor and the plains to the north of it and sea-girt lands around the south of it that the great double change was first made, not so much on this first occasion because the people were more advanced as because geography and climate helped them. From now on our story centres round these parts of the world, parts destined to be the cradle of civilization as Africa had probably been the cradle of mankind.

We have reached by now a date of something like 8000 B.C., long enough ago in all conscience but only yesterday when one thinks in terms of the tens and indeed of hundreds of thousands of years of the Old Stone Age, or for that matter of the millions of years needed when surveying the world before man came. From now on we speak of *millennia*, Latin word for thousands of years; by the time we get to Helen and Troy we are speaking in centuries.

But that is obviously not yet. Man's progress was very slow, though accelerating. If you could look at a globe that was dark until the spark of civilized rather than savage living arrived, then the glow would have been very faint at first,



hardly distinguishable and yet never quite disappearing, then steadily increasing, and then like ■ smouldering bonfire suddenly and almost miraculously bursting into flame. And, once again, the heart of the glow would be around the Eastern Mediterranean. There would soon be other spots, but that would be the biggest; and that is where our gaze now remains. . . .

First rivers, then boats. With small, swarthy people, rather nimble and slender, swarming and proliferating. That is the most significant picture.

First rivers. The rivers that concern us are the large ones that bring down rich mud and silt each spring from the melting snows of the mountains at their source and spread them over the flat plains of their lower reaches. It was this yearly miracle that helped man to proliferate or in the Bible phrase to "increase and multiply". *Anything* would grow in these rich valleys: two harvests a year sometimes, corn that increased "some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold"—and more. The most famous of such areas were the Nile Delta and the lower reaches of those twin rivers that swim gently out into the Persian Gulf, the Tigris and the Euphrates. And if you follow the direction of these twin rivers to their source, then on westwards till you reach the coast, then down southwards through Syria and Palestine and the Jordan Valley and then skirt north of the Sinai Peninsula till you reach the Nile, you have joined up from one of

these sites to the other, and formed a curve, roughly crescent shaped in the process. All that crescent—called the Fertile Crescent because in those days it certainly was fertile—soon became populated. People too spread out into the surrounding hills, where there were green valleys in between, or where there was grass or at least oases. These were the people, by and large, who preferred to be cattle-herders, *pastoralists*, rather than *agriculturists*. And, again by and large, these would be the more adventurous people, who preferred wandering with their flocks to staying put with their crops and granaries. They were the nomads.

The people left behind were by no means stuck in the mud, however. They were the real founders of civilization. They founded villages, that grew into towns, and from these more villages that grew into more towns. They became highly religious, or we might say superstitious, and suffered to rule over their little towns big men who were "priest-kings": high priests, chief warriors and head administrators all rolled into one. And then one of these, bigger or more ambitious than his fellows, would manage to make himself governor of a collection of townlets, king of a kingdom. That was happening all over the Fertile Crescent: Egypt came into existence as the combining of an upper and lower kingdom of the Nile; Sumeria grew from a number of townlets around the mouths of the Twin Rivers. Both areas had invented writing

by now, Egypt using walls (no one told them not to in those days) or papyrus which is the father of all paper, and Sumeria using just the same sort of clay tablets (except that they baked them) as the Minoans and Mycenaeans used. They were using them, too, mostly for exactly the same sort of purpose, to keep palace accounts—they must have needed a small army of civil servants, the first bureaucracy, to do the job. And meanwhile they were spreading their culture, their know-how of farming, not only around the Mediterranean but up north and west into Europe—peoples who reached right up into Scandinavia came originally from Asia Minor, probably for that matter via Troy. And to help them spread themselves they had already the invention of boats.

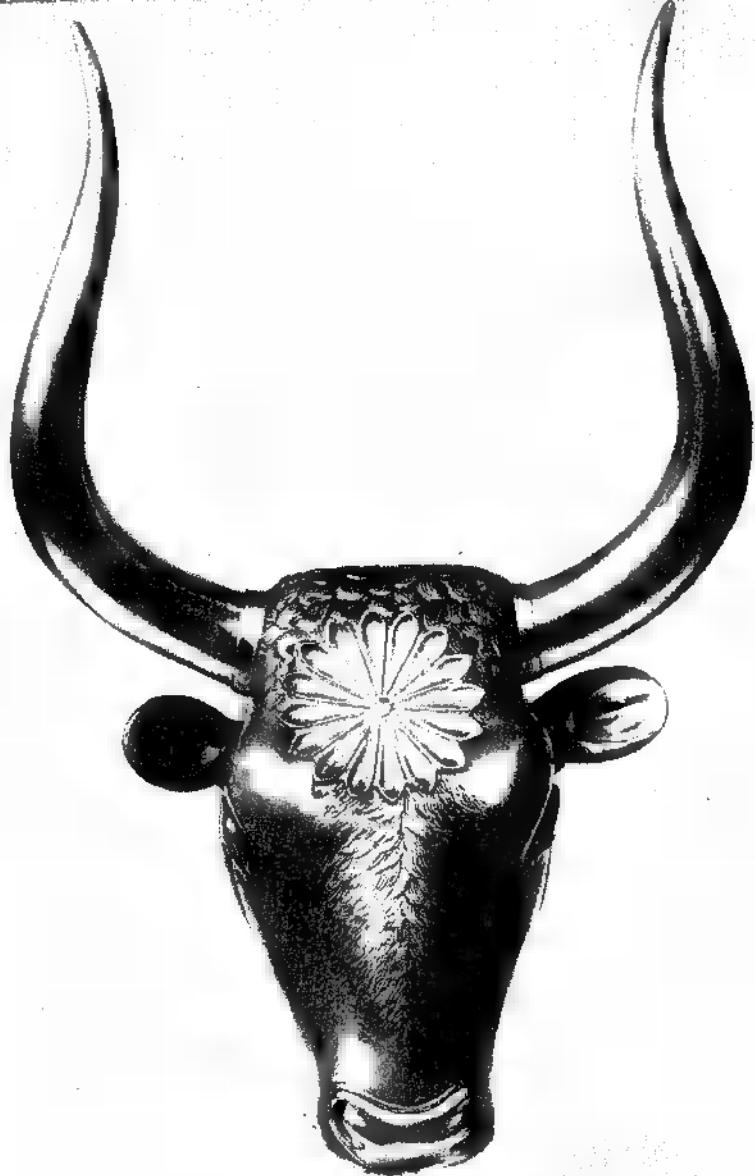
Rafts must have been the beginning of transport on the water, or sewn up and blown up skins of animals, or even just the lopped-off tree trunk. You need these to cross the river, then to travel up and down the river. Then you made a better boat, by stretching the hide over a wicker framework. Then, with your new tool, the smooth stone axe or the same thing copied in bronze, and with your flint saw you hewed out planks, and bent them when wet, and laid one over the other, and made small holes in them and with sinew sewed them together—and had as good a boat, nearly, as a rowing boat or a sailing dinghy of today. Then you went to sea.



*(Left)* A statuette known as  
"The Boy God."

*(Below)* The Homeric boar's-  
tusk helmet.





Mycenaean finds that might well have come from Crete: a magnificent bull's head.



A long drink. "Rhyton," as carried by cup-bearers (see plate 2): boxing, and an unhappy accident with a bull.



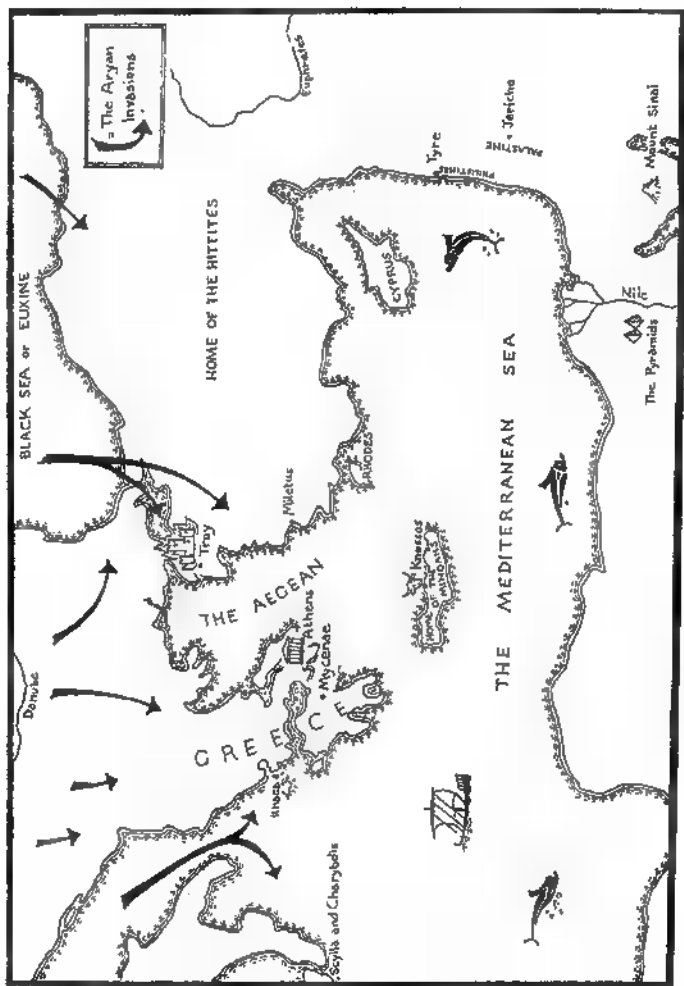
The proud prince from Knossos.

Probably in fact you had gone to sea earlier than that. Don't underrate the adventurousness of the early people; but don't on the other hand think of this going to sea as an extraordinary or supremely difficult thing to have done. In many countries of the Mediterranean, mountainous Greece for instance, it is the obvious thing to do when you want to get from one place to another: row across the smooth bay rather than go round and up and down the steep mountain pass. The really terrifying time came only when you lost sight of land—how terrifying you can guess from the tall stories that Odysseus told—but fortunately in the Mediterranean you did not have to lose sight of land for so very long at a time. . . .

So these people of Asia Minor and Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, who were going ahead so fast in civilization, managed to colonize by sea as well as by land. That is the next great historical fact. They sailed to Cyprus, the Greek isles, and to Crete.

This came about at the end of New Stone Age times and in the early Bronze Age. Centuries and centuries passed. They were mostly peaceful though by no means always: every now and then the nomads, keeping themselves tough and hardy but growing discontented and like all men desirous of change, would descend on the comparatively flabby and effete townsmen and would take over from them—to become flabby in their turn. That at least is a good generalization,





Map II. The Eastern Mediterranean World

one 'however that must not be taken too literally or universally. The "Land of the Two Rivers" (Tigris-Euphrates) suffered badly in this way, the great prize becoming the fabulous Babylon. Egypt near the beginning of the Second Millennium was overrun and ruled for some generations by the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings—*tough* shepherds. Only Crete, in the middle of the Mediterranean, was safe—for the present.

With the second millennium (2000 to 1000 B.C.) gradually comes trouble—disturbance, greater restlessness and movement of peoples. Perhaps the "cradle of civilization" is becoming cramped, or the baby too obstreperous; perhaps a more fundamental cause was the fluctuation and changes in climate, a sure pusher of people around. At some time now the Israelites, suffering from drought, troop into Egypt. The names of new and warlike people begin to be heard of, Assyrians, Hittites. And a thunder cloud, with lightning flashing out of it, becomes visible in the north.

In fact a new people appear upon the central scene. They come from around the steppes of Russia. They are nomads and have begun to tame the horse. They are mostly fair and mostly big. They worship gods of the sky, of the unpredictable storm and thunderbolt but also of the cheerful sun, and not the gods of the earth who tend to be gloomy and sinister and to demand much sacrificial blood before they will let things grow again in the spring. They speak a

language which has come to be called Aryan or Indo-European.

They are, of course, the ancestors of the Greeks—and of many else besides, including the Persians and the non-Dravidian Indians. Their drift to the South is long drawn out, one tribe after another; and a moving tribe does not usually hurry itself, stopping for a generation or two on the way. But like a glacier nothing stops it in the end.

The newcomers always seem to prosper. When they don't kill off the original occupants of the land they enslave them and rule over them. They may even be kind to them. They will not scorn to learn from them: new ways of doing things, clever town ways of doing things, new words too when there isn't a word in their own language—such as the word for sea which these people from the steppes have never seen before. They will learn not to fear the sea, so that soon they will be spreading by sea as well as by land.

At last we are reaching the times of our own story. These Aryan-speaking people who have elected to come down into the Greek peninsula are becoming thoroughly established. They are building homesteads, and some of the more successful are becoming barons or kinglets, or even kings over kinglets, and are building homesteads that are fortified with great walls against their rivals. We have arrived in fact at the time of Mycenae, and the ancestors of

Agamemnon. They are no longer uncivilized tribesmen but have formed a highly successful ruling class over the natives and are capable of running an establishment nearly as "bureaucratic" as a Sumerian city-state. But they are still out-of-door folk, a hunting, shooting and fighting aristocracy. They know all about Crete and the king there who calls himself Minos; they may more than a little fear him, but they encourage Cretan "tinkers" to come and work for them, and though they let these people decorate in their own particular artistic style they see that the subjects chosen are what they like themselves. . . .

We may jump now—not a very big jump—to the year 1400 B.C. and to the two centuries that begin with that year. They are centuries of tremendous happenings that set in motion a change in the history of the world. In them Egypt, which has built an empire, sees it begin to crumble, loses its Israelite slaves who set out for the Promised Land, suffers the strange intellectual excitement of the reign of Akhnaten the Heretic King. In them the Hittites rise to power and begin to fall again, and the Assyrians, the cruellest soldiers on record, conquer Babylon. At their beginning Knossos is destroyed; at their end, Troy. That is surely enough for any two centuries. Nor does violence, as we shall see, cease at the end of them.

There is unmistakable evidence that Knossos,

on one spring day when the wind was in the south, was enveloped in fire and ruin. Comparative dating gives the year pretty accurately at about 1400 B.C. But the cause thereof, and the truth of the happenings around that date, are still in dispute. Some say that the city fell to earthquake—you remember the roaring of the bull and the Minoan's fear of earthquake. Others say the cause was invasion from across the sea. And who more likely to invade than the Mycenaean Greeks, who were subject to the Cretans but had learnt all they could from their superior civilization and had come now to cast off the yoke?—the truth in fact behind the fable of Theseus and the Minotaur.

But now of course there is a further difficulty. When Knossos fell the place was already Greek—as Ventris shows, it was producing palace tablets that were written in the Greek language.

What then is the truth? It is as yet hard to say, perhaps it always will be hard. One helpful clue is that the art of writing in the Greek "Linear B" appears to go back only half a century or so. Before that it is "Linear A", and that is not in Greek. For two or three generations, then, before the catastrophe—which perhaps was by earthquake—the Greeks had established an ascendancy over Crete, and, as earlier on the mainland, had established a ruling aristocracy there, an aristocracy that must have rapidly taken on the local customs and local ways. That is the most likely explanation. Per-

haps all that this re-interpretation has done in fact is to put back the "Theseus" raid of revenge a hundred years or less. What it does show is that the early Greeks, the Mycenaean Greeks, were more powerful, and had been for a longer period more powerful, than had ever before been imagined.

Finally we come round to Troy again, the fall of Troy which took place at the very end of these two event-packed centuries. The later Greeks liked to teach that the Trojans were some sort of Easterners or Asiatics, that their Mycenaean forefathers had conquered and held back an alien civilization as later they themselves were to hold off the Persians. But this is doubtfully true; it is much more probable that King Priam and his large household were very much like the households of Agamemnon and Menelaus and the rest, an aristocracy that had imposed itself and had once upon a time come from the north: the Greeks were in fact attacking their distant relations.

And if so, why did they do it? We know the fabled and romantic cause. Was that all there was to it?

There may have been a reason much more down to earth. It was suggested in the last chapter, you remember, that one of the ways to grow rich which was open to these proud people who would not demean themselves by trade, might be to *take a toll* of trade. In other words they did not let the trader's caravan pass, or his

ship pass, without making him pay—rather like the seaside farmer of today who will not let you through his gate and on to his beach without a fee. The cyclopean-walled Mycenae stands in an ideal position to enforce such a toll, a conical hill rather like our own Corfe Castle, and commanding a pass between mountains. And Troy? An interesting fact has been discovered about Troy. There is something more to it than that it stands on a major sea route for ships. Down the narrows of the Dardanelles comes a current so strong that round the promontory on which Troy stands it is almost impossible to sail or row a boat. Cargoes therefore would be dumped, and carried by mule pack, to be picked up by another boat on the farther side of the headland; even perhaps both cargo and boat were humped across. What better and richer opportunity then for Priam of Troy? What richer opportunity for anyone who could conquer Troy? . . .

And that, you may say, makes of the Greeks and the Trojans nothing more than robber barons. Such, unfortunately, though it may be only one side of the truth, may nevertheless *be* the truth. Homer's heroes have many titles of which they were proud; and one is "Sacker of Cities". Violence is likely to breed violence; all things change; and even the strongest walls will not protect for ever.

# 10

## HELEN AND THE HELLENES\*

**Y**OU, A GIRL, are one of the handmaidens to Helen. You are of noble blood of course, you have your pedigree; but like Aethre, mother of Theseus—and what an old hag she is now!—you were carried off once and so you have to be a handmaiden. You love and admire Helen, though she is a difficult mistress at times. How lovely her dark hyacinth hair is, and how great your happiness when you are allowed to brush it. And if only you could walk the way Helen walks. Like a swan gliding on the water. But they say her father was Zeus, and that he came to her mother in the form of a swan; that might explain a lot.

But how tired you are of Troy, and the Trojans. Hector is a dear. But Paris is sickening, and King Priam an old dodderer—will Zeus strike you with his thunderbolt for talking of a king like that, even to yourself?

You feel imprisoned and walk out on to the battlements. It is a spring evening and the air has a tang of the sea. There lies the flat plain of

\* This is the name by which the Greeks of classical times knew themselves; Homer's Greeks ■ called Achaeans or Danaans.



Troy and it has no interest for you. The tamarisk shows pink at its edges and soon it will be in flower. But it is bent down almost to the ground by the eternal wind. The wide Scamander flows below you and your eye follows it longingly to the edge of the sea. That is what fascinates you, the sea—and what lies beyond. One day perhaps you will be rescued and you will sail back to the brooks and hills and green pastures of Argos, where the horses graze. You stare westward, half blinded by the setting sun, and dream. . . .

What are those black dots on the sea? Your heart pounding, you shade your eyes, peeping out beneath your hand to watch those dots grow and approach the shore. Are the sun and your eyes tricking you? But you know those shapes. You wait patiently as so slowly they grow. Now you can see the sweep of oars. There is no longer any doubt.

"Mistress! Mistress! The Greeks are back!"

You, a boy, are page and companion to the grandson of Nestor, King of Pylos. This is your first expedition and you are lucky to be allowed to come, back here to Troy where surely this year the issue will be settled.

You have had to jump out and help beach the boats through the surf, and the wind blows, and you are wet and miserable—and ashamed at feeling miserable. You watch the sacrifice that is made in thanks for ■ safe voyage, and you feel

a little sick, and sorry for the animals. But then fires are lit and tents put up, and the smell of roasting meat comes to your nostrils, and in due course you feed, and you feel better.

The light wanes and you and your companion, exhausted, lie down to sleep. But not in any of the tents; the elder men get those. There is some row or other amongst the Myrmidons. . . .

Almost at once you are asleep and dreaming. Pallas Athene, Athene of the piercing eyes, has come to visit you. She wears a tunic and gold, winged sandals and on her head a martial twin-plumed helmet. She tells you not to be afraid, and that Troy will fall, and that you will acquit yourself like a man and acquire much honour.

You wake; and, sitting up, see in the distance the walls of Troy lit at intervals by fires. Besides those fires, you know, are sentries, keeping watch by their fitful glare. And behind them somewhere is Helen; Helen herself, the beautiful, the captive waiting to be rescued. If, perhaps, you could be the one to rescue her. . . .

Is that all fanciful, all tommy-rot? Not if we are allowed to see some truth in Homer, as certainly we are allowed. Men were always seeing dreams and visions of the gods, very real visions—indeed the gods in the *Iliad* take sides and give the mortals great encouragement. Just how the early Greeks regarded their gods is too big and difficult a subject to tackle here. But another set of modern scientists, not the archaeo-

logists but the psychologists, can help us to shed some light on the subject and to see some sense in it all. The gods in Homer, one may say, act as embodiments of men's better natures, of their consciences, exhorting them as we would describe them exhorting themselves. "Don't be a coward, man!" It is not Paris talking to himself, but the goddess who befriends him, Aphrodite. Or Athene of the flashing eyes talking to another of the heroes:

"Now, Diomedes, you can fight the Trojans fearlessly. I have filled your heart with the audacity of your father Tydeus!"

No Greek could remain unaffected when the appeal was to his pride and his lineage.

And then would any young warrior have been so romantic about Helen? Have we not talked of towns in strategic positions and the advantages of taking toll of trade—*that* is what these tough and greedy warriors wanted!

I do not believe that that is true. Or rather, the truth, I believe, lies half way between. Tough people are not above being sentimentalists. And what a glorious and romantic battle cry the rescue and avenging of Helen was. In other words, Agamemnon and Menelaus offered their companions *glory*—and at the same time every soldier knew without being told that with glory went gain. You saved Helen and gathered loot, and had the best of both worlds. The psychologists can come to our help again:

human motives, they say, are nearly always delightfully mixed . . .

Yes, it all ends, as we know, not in the capture of Troy, the taking over of Troy as a going concern, but in the utter destruction of Troy.

These people in fact are the victims of their own violence. There comes to us, as we read, and as we piece together the evidence, a feeling of irrevocable ruin in the air, of the cracking up of an era. These heroes, what happens to them? They go home to meet treachery and violence. Or they disappear and we hear of them no more. They and their fathers we know, and sometimes their sons. But no more. In the words of another tragedy: "The rest is silence."

What in truth was happening? Our imagined young warrior, if he was attached to the family of Nestor, would have gone back to Pylos, a citadel fifty miles west of Mycenae as the crow flies. And at Pylos some of the "Linear B" tablets have been found that date from just this time. Sketchily, with tantalizing incompleteness, they seem to tell a desperate tale.

They talk of military and naval dispositions, they give orders. Thirty rowers are to go to Pleuron. And Pleuron, according to Homer, was on the Corinthian Gulf, away to the *north*. Two other tablets list over 400 rowers, mentioning "rowers who are absent". Deserters? Funks?

But that is building up rather a lot: it may of course have all been a peaceful affair. More

dramatic is a group of tablets dealing with what is called an *o-ka*, which is generally agreed to have been some sort of military unit or command. Ten Commands are listed and the name of the commander given, while with each is the "Follower"—name also given. And the whole begins with the sentence:

*Thus the watchers are guarding the coastal areas.*

At the first sign of danger from the sea will the "Follower" leap into his two-horse chariot and come galloping back to tell the king? That is what it looks like.

And the danger? There is no doubt about that. From about 1200 B.C. onwards there came down from the north a *fresh* invasion of Greek-speaking peoples, greater and more desperate and more ruthless than any that had come before. Some of them wield swords of iron, against which weapons of bronze, and armour of bronze, are of little avail. This invasion is called the invasion of the Dorians. The great citadels of Homer's Greeks, Mycenae, Pylos and the rest, fall in ruins, to survive into the time of classical Greece as no more than villages that have a vaguely remembered greatness. The invasions and the migrations continue, with the dispossessed no doubt sometimes dispossessing others, so that the Greek islands and Crete and the Asia Minor coast are all affected. The elaborate "bureaucracy" of the king's fortified country house crumbles with the house. Even

the ability to write and read seems to disappear. The fall of Troy has opened the flood gates; and a *Dark Age* has descended upon the Greek world.

Something indeed like a dark age descends also on the rest of the "cradle of civilization". In Asia Minor the Hittites who, perhaps as the first great users of iron, have risen to a power that rivals Egypt's, sink back to insignificance with a capital city razed to the ground by other people who are also Aryan or Aryan-led. Egypt, lately owner of the greatest empire of its history, desperately allies herself with the Hittites, but gradually sees her greatness leave her, never to return.

Such is the sad and surprising end to the age of the Bronze Age heroes.

And yet all, obviously, cannot quite have been lost. Life must and does go on. And iron, making better weapons, also makes better tools—and cheaper tools too when the more difficult methods of smelting have been learnt. The plough redressed the balance against the sword. Country-house life settled down again, the life of the *megaron*, and the horse and hunting, and the feasting of the guest, a sort of pale reflection of Homer's descriptions perhaps, for Homer knew his own diminished times and was trying to make them sound grand enough for the greater times of the past. Then there were the Phoenicians, who were carrying trade, and ideas,

about the world, and perhaps in some ways all the more successfully so, now that the power of those kinglets in the castles who took a tribute had waned. The ideas fell on fertile ground in the mind of the Greeks, Dorians and pre-Dorians alike, and the Greeks took over the Phoenician alphabet and began to write and read again, very much more efficiently than they had ever done in the times of "Linear B". By the beginning of the 8th century B.C. Greece was prosperous and astir once more, spreading and founding over the eastern Mediterranean little colony-cities in emulation of the cities at home. Then many of these cities, self-contained, grew into "City-States", ruled by autocratic "Tyrants", who were however not always so tyrannical or beastly as our use of the word would have us believe. Gradually the citizens began to get rid of their Tyrants and to achieve a more democratic government of their own. Athens took the lead in this. The great civilization of classical Greece was, in the 6th century B.C., about to flower.

And however did it manage to flower out of the rumbustious, swashbuckling savagery of the Homeric Greeks? That is the last question that the discoveries of Henry Schliemann and Arthur Evans and Michael Ventris pose for us.

To say that flowers blossom best out of manure is merely to beg the question—and to be unnecessarily rude to Odysseus and company at the same time. They were not *all that* bad!

Nevertheless, here is not an easy question to answer.

Perhaps it is most helpful to point out that any "culture", any way of life, depends tremendously upon the *tradition* in which it exists. Things are not questioned. Since the idea had grown up amongst our own forefathers of 150 years ago that the poor always would be poor and it was all right for little children to work down in the coal mines, then work there the little children did and most people were not worried a bit. If it was the idea amongst Ajax and Menelaus and conservative old Nestor that the thing to do was to sack a city and kill off the men and steal the women, then that was what everyone did. All of which did not prevent both of those robust societies, of A.D. 1800 and 1200 B.C., from not only being successful but also possessing some resounding virtues.

In other words, the early Greeks owned many virtues that offset their vices. They must have been of good stock, with pretty good heads and on the whole good hearts, and with tremendous possibilities of improvement inside them.

Above all they were vital and alive and not tired out as were perhaps the little swarthy races of the Mediterranean by centuries and centuries of sameness and of superstition. We have spoken of the newcomers' *sky* religion as opposed to the *earth* religion of most of the people they displaced; and it was, there is no doubt, the happier, more open, less mind-restricting religion



of the two. The People from the North were awed by their gods but not terrified by them—they could even laugh at them at times. . . .

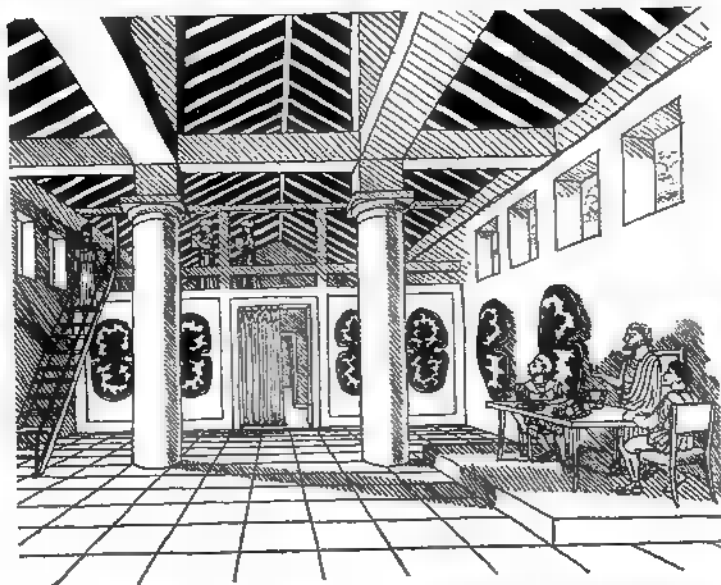
Of course ■ capacity to laugh at your gods is not necessarily a prerequisite for founding the world's greatest and most stimulating civilization. But maybe it helps. What is undoubtedly true is that the early Greeks were straight and tough *minded*, as they were straight and tough bodied. They saw things, if rather pessimistically perhaps, plainly; they did not hoodwink themselves. In the companion book to this, *Finding Out About the Athenians*, there is quoted the little poem that sets out the four best things that ■ Greek could expect from life:

Health is the best heaven sends;  
Next, to be pleasant to look upon;  
Third is riches justly won;  
Last to be young among one's friends.

There is, you see, no illusion about the disadvantages of becoming old and ugly, no pining after ■ better life after death. An Egyptian would probably have combined grosser and more material things with a pious desire for a grand tomb in his lifetime that would magically ensure his happiness after death. Perhaps the best we can do to solve the conundrum of how the greatness of Greek grew is to repeat that the Homeric Greeks had the *manly* virtues—and to guess that the manly virtues are the best foundation for things higher and more spiritual.

Whatever is the correct answer, no one will deny I think that there was *something* about those heroes of ancient Greece whose story we have recounted and of whose one-time existence we have become assured. It is not by chance that they have remained for over three thousand years the subject of the Western World's favourite story, the story of Helen of Troy.

And did Helen herself survive the holocaust? Legend says so; and, though perhaps it is more than she deserves after all the trouble she caused, or even more than was likely, we will hope that legend was right. Let us leave her then, as the grand lady entertaining the handsome young son



A megaron: Helen comes down to talk to Odysseus's son

of Odysseus, and in the warm safety of her hall remembering only the sunny side.

Helen, meanwhile, the child of Zeus, had had a happy thought. Into the bowl in which their wine was mixed, she slipped a drug that had the power of robbing grief and anger of their sting and banishing all painful memories. . . .

When Helen had thrown the drug into the wine and seen that their cups were filled she turned to the company once more and said: "King Menelaus and my young and noble guests, each of us has his happy times, and each his spells of pain—Zeus sees to that in his omnipotence. Then why not be content to sit at dinner in this hall and see what pleasure we can get by telling tales?"

Why not, indeed? For as we now know, and surprisingly enough, not all of the tales were beyond the truth.

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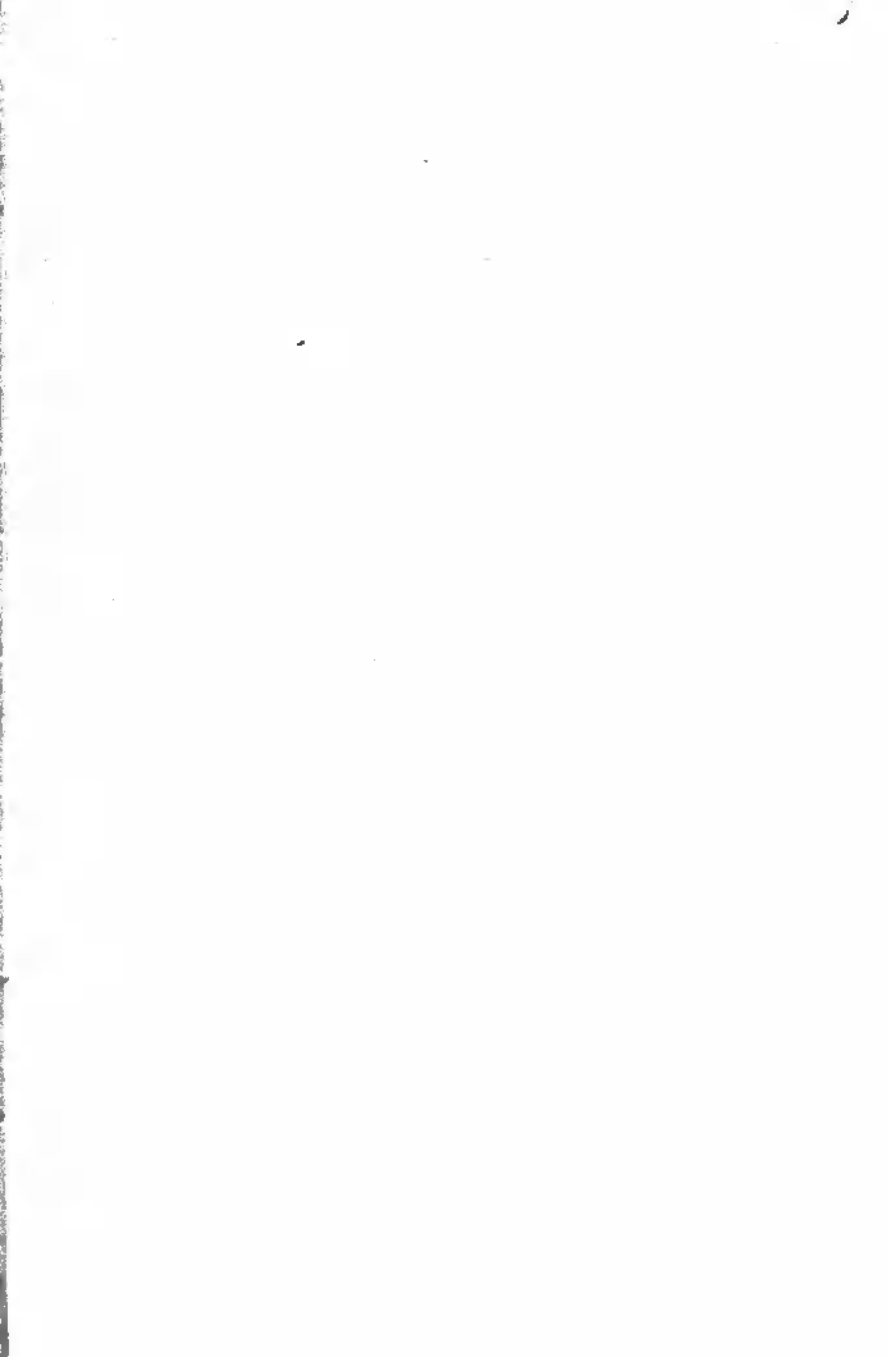
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